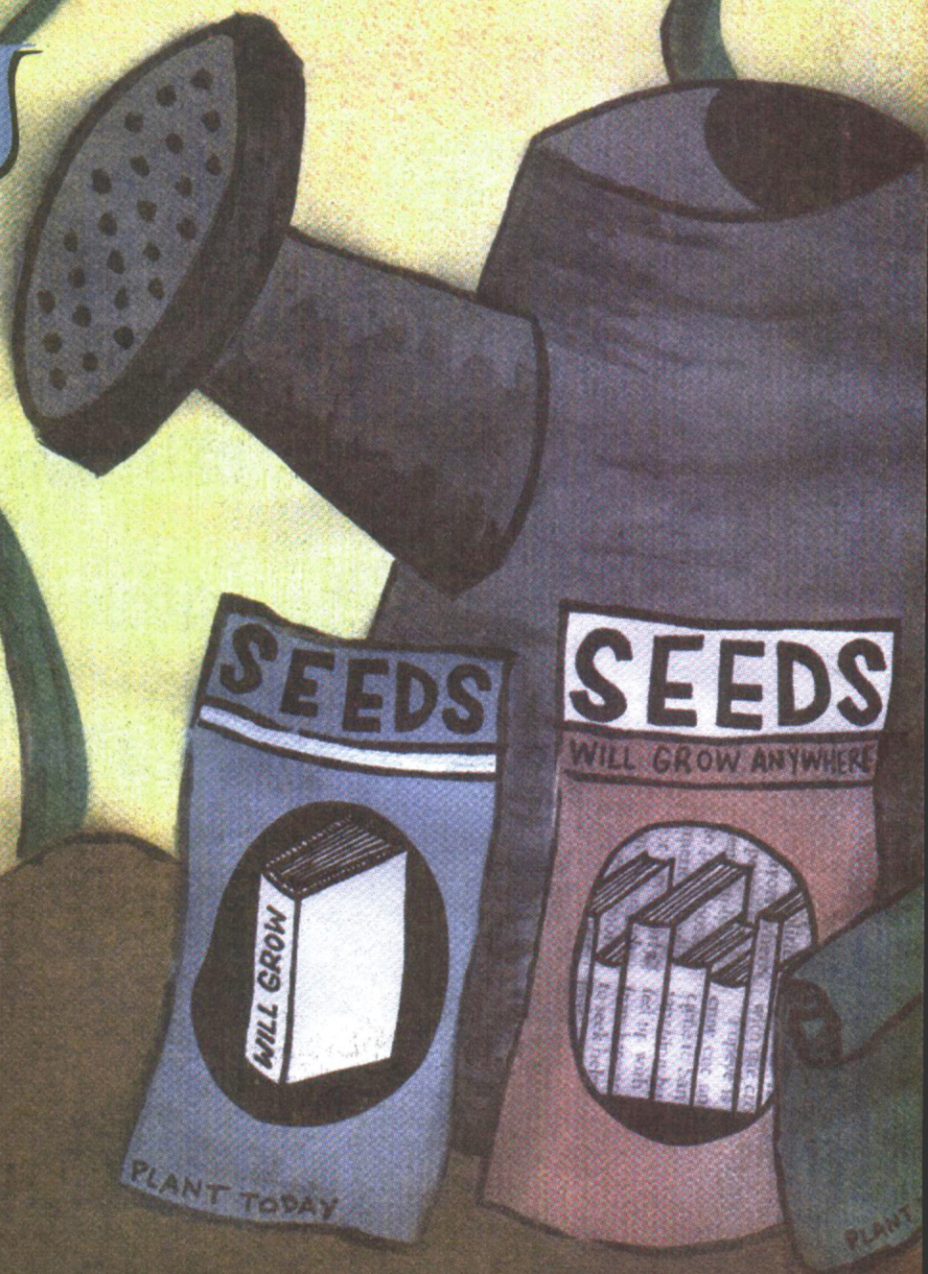


In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

May 14, 2001

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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

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Publisher's Notes

As George W. Bush rolls out his agenda in the form of detailed legislative proposals, it becomes clearer that we are heading for a major ideological battle in Washington. On the one hand, we have a conservative program of immense tax cuts for the wealthy and a massive increase in military funding. The net effect will be a return to huge federal deficits and a draconian decrease in social services. On the other hand, progressives will push for an increase in these social services and will attempt to strengthen the social contract. In elemental terms this will be a conflict between a "tax cut and spend" philosophy and a "tax and spend" philosophy.

Interestingly, neither Republicans nor Democrats question that we will have an increase in the military budget—they merely argue about its size and what it will be used for. In the 2000 presidential campaign, Al Gore actually proposed a *larger* increase in military spending than Bush. Only Ralph Nader had the temerity to suggest that we should actually decrease military spending.

Democrats have abandoned talk about the peace dividend. Outside of the comments of a few hearty Congress members like Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) and Barbara Lee (D-California), the concept isn't mentioned. Yet recent polls indicate that Americans are not all that enamored with either a big tax cut for the rich or a massive military buildup. So a viable alternative would appear to be: cut the military budget, use these funds to strengthen the social contract, and give everyone but the rich a tax cut. This would move Democrats away from the "tax and spend" opprobrium to a more appealing "cut taxes and reduce overall spending" stance.

So what keeps this from happening? Why can't there be a peace dividend? If you ask longtime Washington observers, they typically respond in one of three ways. It's the fault of the peace movement, which has gotten old and tired; it's the fault of Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council who, in an effort to capture independent and Republican voters, embraced the conservative defense philosophy ("mine is bigger than yours"); or it's the fault of the entire Democratic Party, which has positioned itself as pro-defense in an effort to lure back white male voters.

Each of these responses makes sense—superficially. But looking closer at the conventional explanations, they raise more questions than they answer. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the peace movement hasn't gotten a lot of press attention or generated a lot of excitement. However, the basic point made at the end of the Cold War—that there is no good reason not to spend less on defense and divert this spending to social services—was valid then and remains valid now.

While Clinton and the DLC certainly have moved the Democratic Party to the right and have embraced the Republican defense posture, many progressive Democrats question our continuing need to spend as if those "Russkies" were knocking on our door. Why do these Democrats speak so softly?

Finally, if the stealth Democratic strategy is to embrace defense spending in order to lure back white male voters ("Look! We're tough on Communism! We support our armed forces!"), it's not working. In the last presidential election, Democrats lost the white male vote across the board, a repeat of what has happened for the past 30 years.

So other factors must be sought to explain why the campaign for the peace dividend has diminished. We need to understand what these are before we can stand toe-to-toe with Bush and the conservative onslaught—a confrontation that will require building the strongest possible case for the peace dividend.

Gore actually proposed more military spending than Bush? What happened to the peace dividend?

In this spirit, I would like to suggest that Democrats and progressives have lost the campaign for the peace dividend because they have also lost the campaign for family values. These seemingly separate subjects are connected in a way that cuts below the superficial analysis of the Beltway pundits.

Brace yourselves for my next column—bburnett@inthesetimes.com. ■

Bob Burnett

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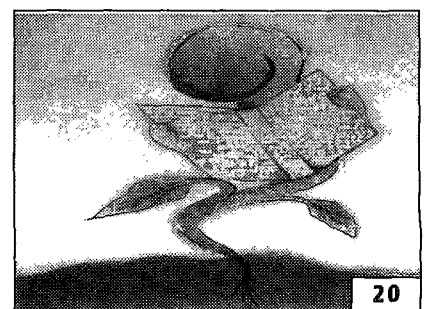
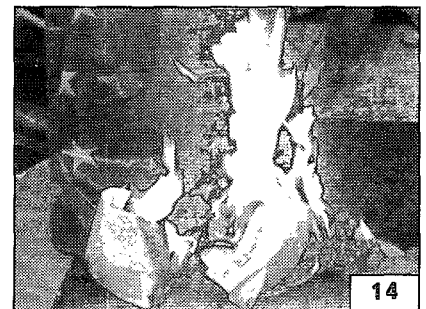
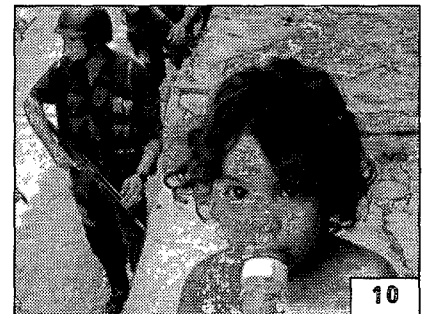
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Cover Illustration: Josh MacPhee

Letters

Defense Myths

There is a quaint quality about Lawrence Korb's assertion that "the main reason political leaders continue to approve ever larger expenditures on defense than necessary is that they have accepted a series of misleading assumptions, or half-truths, about the current state of America's military" ("Ten Myths About the Defense Budget," April 2). Why, one wonders, does he use "accepted" when the more apt word is "created" or "welcomed"?

Korb surely must know that—given the current enormity of the U.S. war machine—the main reason ever larger defense expenditures are appropriated by leaders of both major parties is the politician's need to provide welfare for armaments manufacturers like Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics, et al. The misleading assumptions and half-truths are simply the usual pap they expect the American public to accept.

Lester Goldstein
Seattle

Lawrence Korb makes some good points concerning the size of the military and current procurement strategies. However, I take exception to his partial, and misleading, explanations of two of the "myths."

"Myth #8: The services are failing to meet their recruiting goals, even though they have lowered the quality standards they maintained in the '80s."

Korb assures us that the quality of military recruits remains high. However, in "disproving" this myth he says nothing about the number of recruits entering the military. The first part of his myth, and not the latter, is the issue that should be addressed. As I understand it, the military is well under strength.

"Myth #9: Personnel are leaving the services because a much higher percentage of the force is deployed overseas than during the Cold War."

Korb is failing to distinguish between military personnel who are stationed overseas and those who are deployed overseas. During the Cold War, large forces were stationed in Germany and Korea (and elsewhere) in what can best be described as garrison duty—these personnel lived in military housing, were mostly accompanied by their families, and enjoyed basically stable lives and reasonable living conditions. Since the end of the Cold War, military forces have been deployed frequently to various areas of the globe (the Balkans, Somalia, Haiti and the Middle East). These missions tend to be of short (a year or less) duration and are characterized by primitive (at best) living conditions and prolonged separation from family and loved ones. Anyone should be able to see the dis-

tingtion between being stationed in Germany and being able to go home to one's family at the end of the day and being deployed in Bosnia, Haiti, or Somalia and being able to go home to one's drafty tent for a few hours of sleep each night.

Not only does Korb assert incorrectly that deployments are actually down, but he tells the reader nothing about actual turnover rates in the military, or the reasons cited by personnel for leaving the military. Had he done any research into this issue, I suspect that his "myths" would have proven to be reality.

Cpl. James H. Boschma
Troop E, 31st Cavalry
Alabama Army National Guard
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

I fully agree with Lawrence Korb that the Pentagon's budget has vast room for revision. I further agree that leaders have "accepted a series of misleading assumptions, or half-truths, about the current state of America's military."

But whenever one discusses the military prior to either World War in comparison to the military of today, as Korb does, it would be good to remember that we spent the first year of losing both World Wars—sending thousands of inexperienced civilians into combat, allowing attrition and the terrors of combat to train the soldiers that eventually drove back the enemy. The point of today's standing Army and its realism-based training program is to avoid those massive initial casualties.

But this does not compare to what follows. I wonder how Korb, former assistant secretary of defense for manpower, reserve affairs and logistics, could attest that the two-war strategy "defies ... history." Was the 50th anniversary of World War II not enough to remind him of the two-front war that spawned that policy?

The greatest myth of the Pentagon is that high-tech equipment can replace human soldiers on the ground. This myth is an especially powerful one, since it appears to reduce the risk of American casualties—and is a massive pork barrel for military manufacturers. This prioritizing of technology over troops leads to the second-greatest myth—that "fringe benefits" for soldiers are unnecessary. Many of these "fringe benefits" (such as health care) have been slowly drawn down over the last decade, making it harder for soldiers to support their families. Insofar as post housing (another "benefit") goes, I'd just like to ask Korb if he's lived in base housing recently. Or, if he'd be comfortable having his family living in a house where the lead paint had not been removed, but just painted over.

The defense budget needs serious overhaul. There are plenty of real problems with the military and its budget. I don't understand why Korb had to create imaginary ones to prove his point.

Steven Saus
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri

Thanks, Moberg

Kudos to David Moberg for his article on Free Trade Area of the Americas ("FTAA, Eh?" April 16). As a freelance writer who reads several Canadian papers everyday, I found Moberg provided the most cogent analysis I've seen on that issue. Having failed to inform myself through daily stories that cover only the events, such as protesters and police preparing for the Summit of Americas in Quebec City—and not actual trade issues or the protesters' reasons for such passionate resistance, I am pleased to assert that I am now informed. Before, I was uncertain about attending the summit. That has changed. Moberg, you may just have created one more activist.

James Moran
Ottawa

We're No. 1!

We are pleased to report that Project Censored once again has honored *In These Times* for covering the news ignored by the mainstream media. The magazine earned three spots on this year's list of the "Top Ten Censored Stories," including first place for the third time in the past four years.

Congratulations to Jim Shultz, whose story "Water Fallout: Bolivians Battle Globalization" (May 15, 2000) shared top honors. Joel Bleifuss ("A Tragic Mistake," December 12, 1999) and Seth Ackerman ("Mission Implausible," June 26, 2000) were awarded the No. 4 spot for their reports on the U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Bleifuss, who has won more Project Censored awards than any other journalist, also claimed the No. 7 "most censored" story for his January 10, 2000 article "No Small (Genetic) Potatoes."

In These Times also received a pair of honorable mentions, including another award for Bleifuss at No. 14 ("The Big Stick Approach," April 17, 2000) and one for Frances Cerra Whittlesey at No. 23 ("What's in Your Green Tea?" August 21, 2000).

The winners will be honored at a ceremony on April 28 in San Francisco as part of the Press Freedom Conference and Alternative News Media Exposition. ■

The New Red Menace

By Joel Bleifuss

George W. Bush came to Washington promising to change U.S.-China policy. He abandoned Clinton's "strategic partnership," replacing it with the adversarial definition of China as a "strategic competitor." But in the wake of the spy plane incident—in which a Navy EP-3E surveillance aircraft collided with a Chinese air force jet killing the Chinese pilot and forcing the disabled U.S. plane and its 24-member crew to land at Chinese air base—Bush's China policy morphed into one of "strategic confrontation."

But the administration is divided on the question of China. Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice take the moderate position, one held by the free-trade business and political elite, that any such incident must not be allowed to damage U.S.-China economic relations. (U.S. corporations have invested \$25 billion in China in the past 20 years.) The administration's retro cold warriors, particularly Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, take the hard line favored by the Republican right in Congress.

Initially it was the hawks who appeared to be setting the tone of the U.S. response. "Now it is time for our [crew] to return home, and it is time for the Chinese government to return our plane," said a belligerent Bush two days after the incident. When that proved counterproductive, Powell took center stage with talk of reconciliation and "regret." Though the moderates appeared to carry the day, the cold warriors can now point to the spy plane incident as they ratchet up China as a threat to U.S. global dominance.

Making China our public enemy No. 1 plays into the hands of militarists on both sides of the Pacific. The incident, and resulting public furor in China—not to mention the U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade—has strengthened the

hand of the Chinese generals. The United States is now perceived as presenting a clear and present danger to China's honor, sovereignty and economic aspirations.

In the United States, the resurrected red menace will help the Pentagon garner congressional and public support for its soon-to-be released strategic review (see "The New Marshall Plan," April 2). With China seen as a threat, the military can argue that we need National Missile Defense and its regionally deployed complement, the Theater Missile Defense—Star Wars schemes the strategic review is expected to hype.

U.S. foreign policy machinations already point in that direction. The administration quashed the rapprochement with North Korea. "If peace breaks out on the Korean Peninsula, the Pentagon loses a reason for missile defense," says Robert Weill, an East Asian scholar.

Then there is Taiwan, which wants to buy U.S. destroyers equipped with high-

tech AEGIS radar. That request, supported by congressional Republicans, will get a favorable hearing in an anti-China climate.

Hysteria about China certainly bodes well for the coffers of corporations like Lockheed Martin, where Powell Moore, assistant secretary of defense for legislative affairs, worked as a vice president. SPC International, a high-tech military contractor founded by Dov Zakheim, undersecretary of defense/comptroller, also stands to benefit. At a 1999 symposium at the National Defense University, Zakheim supported the deployment of a Theater Missile Defense in Taiwan, saying, "If Taiwan were able to obtain a TMD capability, it would effectively rob the mainland of its most effective tool for

Making China our public enemy No. 1 plays into the hands of militarists on both sides of the Pacific.

blackmail, and indeed, of its most credible threat to the island."

"Strategic confrontation" also jives with the worldview of the RAND Corporation, where David Chu, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, served as a vice president. RAND advocates a China policy that combines containment and engagement, a strategy it terms "conengagement." In other words, a lexical recipe for a new Cold War. ■

Terry LaBan



Belgrade or The Hague? Yugoslavia debates Milosevic's fate

By Jeremy Scahill

BELGRADE—For anyone closely following events in Yugoslavia since the elections that brought down Slobodan Milosevic last year, the timing of his arrest didn't come as a great surprise. The raid on his luxurious villa in the posh suburb of Dedinje began just hours before the deadline set by Washington, which demanded that the government arrest Milosevic or face losing \$50 million in U.S. aid and access to hundreds of millions of dollars in loans from the International Monetary Fund.

In the weeks leading up to the deadline, prominent politicians in Yugoslavia warned the country would face severe economic consequences if Milosevic were not arrested. But many analysts say the U.S. threats would not have materialized and that Serbia's leaders were aware of that. "The arrest was not just an effort to do the bidding of the United States," says Ljiljana Smajlovic, an expert on U.S.-Yugoslav relations for the Belgrade magazine *NIN*. "By arresting him on the hour set by Washington, it was meant to demonstrate an extraordinary zeal to do this bidding."

Government officials deny any connection between the timing of the arrest and the U.S. demands, but the average person on the street sees that as far too great a coincidence. "They got their marching orders and they carried them out," says Milos Obradovic, a street vendor on Belgrade's busy Knez Mihajlova. "I support the arrest, but not because George W. Bush or the U.S. Congress say so."

Milosevic is currently being held in the Belgrade Central Prison on charges of corruption and abuse of power. Representatives from The Hague war crimes tribunal recently delivered an arrest warrant for the former leader to the Yugoslav Justice Minister. Now the stage is set for a major battle over his extradition to the tribunal to face charges of crimes against humanity during the

Kosovo war. The ruling coalition is divided on the issue, with the pro-West Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic advocating a handover and Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica opposing it.

Many in Serbia want Milosevic prosecuted in Belgrade for what they view as his crimes against the Serbian people. Mirjana Savic, a 35-year-old postal worker says, "The Hague won't just put Milosevic on trial. It would turn into a witch-hunt against all Serb people."

The current Yugoslav constitution forbids the extradition of its citizens. But Washington is once again attempting to call the shots. In a three-page document

Belgrade said recently they have finished drafting a law that would pave the way for Milosevic's transfer. They handed a copy of it over to a Hague delegation visiting Belgrade in early April, despite the fact that it has not been debated publicly in Yugoslavia. This was taken by some analysts in Belgrade as an indication of the country's depleting sovereignty.

Most officials close to Djindjic concede they do not have the political consensus to pass the law, largely due to opposition from Milosevic's allies in the federal parliament from Yugoslavia's smaller republic, Montenegro. The Socialist People's Party (SNP) won all of



Masked police battle with Milosevic's bodyguards at his compound outside Belgrade.

delivered by the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade to Kostunica and Djindjic, Washington "suggests" that following Milosevic's arrest, the government should draft a new law on cooperation with The Hague that "must not assert that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or Serbian courts have superior authority over the ICTY [The Hague]." The document, obtained by *In These Times*, also appears to call for stripping Kostunica's authority over extraditions. "The law should regulate only the procedures for cooperation," it says, "which must not be subject to executive or political approval, or intervention."

Washington's demands on Yugoslavia stand in sharp contrast to U.S. policy opposing the establishment of an International Criminal Court. Nonetheless, pro-West legislators in

Montenegro's seats in last September's federal elections because the government of President Milo Djukanovic boycotted the elections. The SNP has vowed to block passage of any law that would permit extradition. (However, some argue that no change in the law is necessary, since the tribunal is in international U.N. territory and thus not a foreign country.)

Much in Yugoslavia will hinge on the outcome of the Montenegrin elections on April 22. Djukanovic has vowed to hold a referendum on independence should his separatist-minded coalition emerge victorious. If Montenegro breaks from Yugoslavia, Kostunica says new elections should be called in Serbia because the federation would cease to exist. "In that event, Serbia would represent a new state," he said, "making elections a logical outcome."

But Djindjic, who has quickly consolidated his power while winning great praise from the United States and Western Europe, is adamantly opposed to the idea. Djindjic fears that Kostunica, out of a job as federal president, could threaten his grip on power. New elections would undoubtedly give Djindjic much cause for worry with his personal popularity ratings hovering in single digits. Kostunica, who now enjoys mass support, would certainly beat him in any fresh polls.

For now, public sentiment in Serbia remains against The Hague, despite the documentaries on Milosevic's crimes and the infomercials for the tribunal broadcast regularly on Serbian TV. Such broadcasts were encouraged in Washington's memo to the Yugoslav government. "Help educate the Serbian people of the crimes against humanity committed by Milosevic and others," the document said. "Broadcast regular summaries of what goes on in trials at the ICTY."

Milosevic's supporters have launched a campaign of demonstrations outside the central prison. They have vowed to continue their protests as long as the possibility of extradition lingers. As the political power struggle plays out in Yugoslavia, Milosevic remains at the center of the stalemate from an 8-foot-by-8-foot jail cell. ■

Radio Free Roma

Budapest station breaks down "gypsy" stereotypes

By Tony Wesolowsky

BUDAPEST—Anthropologist Livia Jaroka vowed to keep a cool academic head when she agreed to work at Eastern Europe's first all-Roma radio station. But enthusiasm soon got the better of her. "It's incredible what's going on at the station," says the 27-year-old Jaroka, the daughter of a Jewish mother and a father whom she describes as a "very dark-skinned" Roma. "People working here are so dedicated and give so much of themselves."

Radio is a medium suited for the Roma, who often rely on word of mouth to relay news. But as Jaroka says, Radio C is more

than just an information tool. It uplifts one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups on the globe. "The whole image of being a Roma has changed," she says. "People dare to call themselves gypsies."

Some 10 million Roma make Central and Eastern Europe their home. As in much of the region, Hungarian Roma face widespread discrimination in employment, education and social services. Police abuse of Roma is "rampant" in Hungary, according to Human Rights Watch. In the eastern Hungary town of Hajduhadhaz, the European Roma Rights Center reported that police routinely beat and verbally abuse Roma residents, and search their apartments without cause. In Budapest, where 100,000 Roma live, changes to Hungarian law have given authorities more leeway in carrying out evictions of Roma families—a growing problem in Budapest's 8th District, where most of the city's Roma live.

In some ways, race relations between Hungarians and the Roma community have worsened since the collapse of Communism. Democracy pried the lid off pent-up prejudices and biases bottled up under the former regime. "People now feel no fear in telling to you to your face, 'You dirty gypsy,' and nothing happens," Jaroka says.

Although the Communists were hardly friends of Hungary's Roma, the regime did offer them some benefits, namely jobs and housing. Those guarantees have vanished, however, along with the Communist system. "Roma have been totally marginalized," Jaroka says of the transition to capitalism. "They don't go to work any more; they don't have money to lead their former lives. The problems they face have not lessened in the past 10 years."

Jaroka grew up in Sopron, a quaint village near Hungary's western border with Austria. "There weren't any gypsies in Sopron so there wasn't a lot of racism," she says with a slight laugh. But her father's dark skin cost him his job. "The Austrians who travel to Sopron didn't want to be served by a gypsy," she recounts matter-of-factly, "so he was fired."

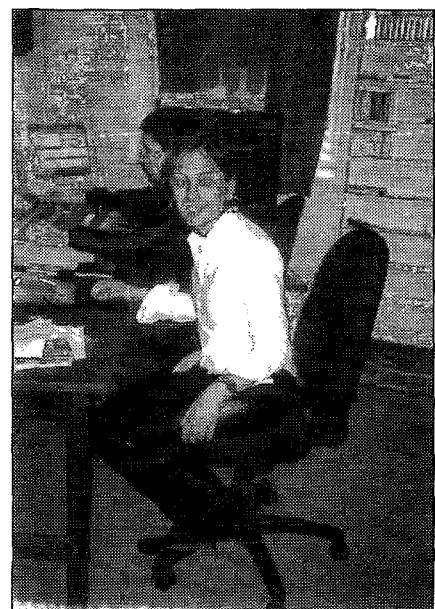
Moving to Budapest as a teen-ager, Jaroka found herself around ethnic kin, awakening a curiosity in her Roma heritage. She went on to Britain to study anthropology, specializing in

Roma culture. But the excitement of working at Radio C led Jaroka to put her studies on hold and take up a full-time job at the station.

Hungarian state radio and television offer an hour of Roma programming each week. But the shows shy away from examining racism and instead enforce stereotypes of Roma as happy-go-lucky traveling minstrels or petty thieves.

The idea of a radio station dedicated to Hungary's Roma was hatched in discussions among Roma intellectuals in Budapest in the late '80s. But it took until this year for the idea to come to fruition, when the station's Roma backers won a trial license for an FM frequency, whose range mainly covers Budapest.

Since Radio C began broadcasting in February, the station has had a huge impact on Hungary's Roma. The station offers lots of Roma music, from the familiar folk variety to the not-so-well-known Roma rap. Most of the programming is



Livia Jaroka in the Radio C office.

ad-libbed, with many in the local Roma community taking part. "We get people coming in off the streets to perform here and sometimes live in the studios," Jaroka says. "Especially on the weekends after the discos close, boys come to the station to perform some song or other."

Radio C also has delved into more hard-hitting, social-oriented reporting. Hours of chat and discussion programs cover topics from Roma history and religion to advice on finding work and

TONY WESOLOWSKY

dealing with police abuse. Reporters cover Roma evictions, demanding that local authorities explain the legal grounds for their actions.

The station has received its share of hate mail, however. And it has few fans in the Hungarian Parliament, especially among the right-wing nationalist parties, who tried unsuccessfully to block the station's seven-year broadcasting license.

Although the station has relied on grants from the European Union and some Western governments—including the United States and India, the original homeland of the Roma—Jaroka says money is station's biggest obstacle. "We're probably going to face financial issues all the time" Jaroka sighs. "But this is nothing new for the Roma. We're used to it."

Overall, Jaroka says the reaction to the station has been overwhelmingly positive. "We are totally amazed how interactive Radio C has become," Jaroka says. "We now have five telephone lines ringing all the time." ■

The Pentagon's People Zapper

A new high-tech laser gun would take aim at protesters

By Martin A. Lee

Good-bye nasty tear gas. So long risky rubber bullets. Welcome to the wonderful world of electromagnetic weaponry.

In March, the PR-conscious Pentagon proudly unveiled what is supposed to be the perfect nonlethal crowd control device—a high-powered energy beam that can disperse an unruly mob without killing, maiming or harming anyone. Military brass are touting it as the biggest breakthrough in war technology since the nuclear bomb.

Known officially as a "Vehicle-Mounted Active Denial System," this new weapon is said to be more humane and more effective than other methods of controlling a large crowd or stopping

aggressive intruders dead in their tracks. Here's how it works. A special transmitter fires two-second bursts of focused microwave energy that causes a burning sensation on the skin of people up to 700 yards away. But no one gets fried and no telltale burn marks linger on the body because the beam only penetrates just beneath the skin's surface at a depth of 1/64th of an inch. Targets of this concentrated electromagnetic pulse briefly experience intense pain and confusion. "It's safe, absolutely safe," said Col. George Fenton, who demonstrated the new gadget in March at the Pentagon's nonlethal weapons center in Quantico, Virginia. "You walk out of the beam and the pain goes away. There are no lasting effects."

The actual zapper, which looks something like a backyard satellite dish mounted on top of an armored car, is still in the experimental phase. Handheld and aircraft-mounted applications are also on the drawing board.

Thus far, 10 years of research and \$40 million have been devoted to this project, which critics have likened to a

That's Entertainment 9.3

In what is possibly the most metaphorically suggestive case in the history of jurisprudence, two California teens are suing MTV for showering them with crap. According to Reuters, the pair ran afoul of the network's extreme entertainment sensibility during a pilot taping last January of a variety show called "Dude, This Sucks."

Monique Garcia and Kelli Sloat, two 13-year-old middle school students from the town of Big Bear, were apparently enjoying the program when production staffers invited them and four friends to the stage. The girls watched unwittingly as the camera crew covered its equipment with plastic, in preparation for the edgy jape that followed.

"All of a sudden I was smelling something disgusting and I started to gag," Garcia explained at a press conference. "I looked around at my friends. They were covered in something. As I looked down at myself I realized that I was, too." The "something" in question had issued, geyser-like, from the posterior regions of two performers identified only as the "Shower Rangers."

"This was a terrible incident," admitted Brian Graden, president of programming at MTV. "It was unintended and we regret that it happened." Just what was intended is unclear, but MTV graciously has promised never to air the footage.

The Flesh Trade 9.7

Police in the former Soviet republic of Moldova have arrested two women for selling human flesh. According to a report in the *Independent*, the women were caught selling the meat outside a butcher shop in the capital city of Chisinau. They told police they had taken it from a state cancer clinic.

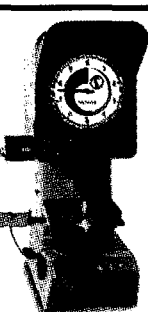
In related news, police in Tanzania claim they have arrested members of a gang they say is murdering children and adults, uh, for their pelts. In the past couple years, the BBC reports, police in the southern region of Mbeya have been on alert for the perpetrators of a bizarre spate of murders in which the entire skin of the victims was "expertly removed." According to the regional police commissioner, the skins

were taken for purposes of witchcraft and probably exported for sale abroad, where a pelt could fetch as much as \$50,000, depending on the age of the victim.

Meanwhile, the creators of a German art exhibition featuring human corpses are taking their show on the road. Professor Günther von Hagens, an anatomist, replaces the fluids of the departed with silicone, epoxy or polyester polymers. According to Ananova.com, he is currently negotiating to bring the exhibition—which features a pregnant woman with a slashed abdomen revealing a fetus—to Britain this spring.



TERRY LABAN



Appall-o-Meter

By Dave Mulcahey

protection does not extend to Barrancabermeja's quarter of a million inhabitants.

On December 22, 140 of Castano's Colombian United Self-Defense Group (AUC) gunmen entered the impoverished, northeastern sector of the city unopposed and began systematically to terrorize one working-class neighborhood after another. By the end of January, after this paramilitary offensive had chalked up 53 assassinations in the first 30 days of the year, Monsignor Jaime Prieto, the bishop of Barrancabermeja, described the situation: "Analyze the reality of this city. What do you see? You see a keg full of petrol, and right beside it, a naked flame. That's what you call a time bomb. Barrancabermeja is a time bomb."

The paramilitaries first came to the city in May 1998.

Two truckloads of hooded, armed men drove past army and police checkpoints and pulled up to a local football field. It was around 10 p.m. on a Saturday night, and the neighborhood was holding a block party. When people heard gunfire they assumed, at first, that the revelers were setting off fireworks. The paramilitaries killed 11 young men that night, and abducted 25 others who were never seen again, dead or alive. Castano claimed they were dead and their corpses had been incinerated.

The current onslaught was triggered by the Colombian government's efforts to establish a demilitarized zone in the region and start negotiations with the ELN, Colombia's second-largest guerrilla force. A year ago, the government and ELN leaders agreed to establish a "peace zone" in territory near the city traditionally controlled by the ELN, but now in paramilitary hands. Demonstrating his regional control, Castano mobilized mass demonstrations to block the proposed "peace zone" and threatened to arm the local population and unleash civil war if the government insisted on going ahead. Under threats from Castano—and paid to collaborate by the regional cattlemen, landowners, narcotraffickers and business leaders who back him—20,000 protesters threw up barricades on the Pan-American Highway and paralyzed all road and river traffic for 20 days.

By the time the government capitulated, the blockade had cost the country \$2 million, and the peace accord with the ELN was back on the drawing board. Twelve months later, the ELN and the government have agreed to a reduced "peace zone"; the European Union has offered to invest \$200 million for regional development once the talks begin; Cuba, Sweden, France, Spain and Switzerland are collaborating to make the zone happen. But the government still has been unable to outmaneuver Castano, and the "peace zone" remains blocked.

As so often in Colombia, the AUC's December incursion in Barrancabermeja was an "invasion foretold." Back in April 1999, Castano's local commander, alias "Julian," announced that his forces were in Barrancabermeja and would take control of the city "by December." AUC actions followed an established pattern. First, a "black hand" silently, anonymously, circulates a list of names. Then the killing starts. In

Barrancabermeja the murders began in the summer: 56 assassinations in June, 62 in July. By year's end, 567 people had been gunned down in the streets, in the shops and cafes, at their offices and in their homes.

Among the targets of these "macabre human huntsmen," as a local newspaper described the killers, were doctors, teachers, secretaries, union members, municipal officials, taxi drivers, church workers, human rights defenders. The police saw nothing; knew nothing; did nothing. Witnesses were too frightened to testify. A petrified silence protected the killers. By the time that gun-toting paramilitary squads appeared openly on the streets, terror had ruptured the trust on which community solidarity depends.

In the second stage, the gunmen tighten the screws. In Barrancabermeja's poor areas, they set up road blocks, sealed off streets and went to work. They had a list of suspected guerrilla sympathizers whom they dragged from their houses and abducted or shot. Gunmen broke down doors, forced residents to hand over the keys to their homes and then moved in. They exploited these captive families to extract information about their neighbors, provide their meals, run their errands and obey their orders. They cut the telephone lines and went house to house seizing cell phones. Then they went for the community leaders.

For 30 years, the guerrillas were a fact of life in Barrancabermeja.

Thirty percent unemployment offered a steady source of rebel recruits; contraband petroleum, acquired by puncturing local pipelines, provided a stream of illegal funding; forking over a "protection fee" was a recognized part of the overhead for doing business in the city. Yet to describe what is happening in the city today as an urban battle between guerrillas and paramilitaries is to miss the point.

Since 1998, the focus of the counterinsurgency war has shifted, and Castano's campaign to win control of Barrancabermeja has revealed the wider political and strategic agenda behind the AUC's offensive, geared to destroy the government's peace efforts and impose their own regional control. In the neighborhoods where Castano's gunmen are imposing their totalitarian dictate today, the guerrillas have long fled or, seduced by AUC power, money and weapons, yesterday's rebels have switched sides. Neglected by successive Colombian governments, the people living here maintain highly developed, autonomous community organizations. It is these groups the AUC has targeted for destruction.

Gerardo (not his real name) is a leader in a neighborhood known as "Comuna 7." On the morning of January 30, armed men forced their way into the local headquarters of a women's organization and demanded the keys to the building. When the women, who use the building to run a community kitchen and provide refuge for displaced families, refused to hand them

over, the "paras" gave them until 4 p.m. to leave and ordered Gerardo to organize a demonstration outside the building to drive the women away. "It's an order," they said. "If you don't obey, we will know. It's simple. You work for us. Or you leave town. Or you die."

What about going to the police? Gerardo shrugged. "The 'paras' make fun of us if we call the police. 'What idiots you are to bring the army and police here,' they say. 'They work with us, didn't you know?'"

The city's civilian leaders have no illusions. The government is weak and unable to re-establish the rule of law or take back control of the streets. The paramilitaries' totalitarian backers are set to prevail. "It's the historic Latin American phenomenon," says Bishop Prieto. "In moments like these an ultra-right appears to impose its own political and economic model. Based on the logic of force rather than the force of logic, it leaves no spaces for liberty, much less for human rights, or for economic and social development based on sustainability and consensus. But their rhetoric is seductive. It promises peace, security, employment. People applaud. I've seen it. In moments like these, they'll go along."

A prominent Barrancabermeja human rights defender agrees, adding: "If this happens in Colombia, we will have 20 years of dictatorship in this country."

As the AUC closes in, it is this dark vision, bleaker than any yet seen during the 40-year insurgency, that lies behind any future escalation of the war. The AUC campaign is driven by powerful economic forces. Barrancabermeja is the



Carlos Castano

largest city in the Magdalena Medio, a region of vast potential wealth and strategic importance. The routes connecting the rest of the country to northern Colombia and the Pacific, and the main road linking Bogota to the industrial heartland of Medellin and the Atlantic coast, all pass through Magdalena Medio.

In addition to oil, Colombia's most important deposits of gold and nickel are buried in the San Lucas mountains north of the city and large cattle ranches and industrial agriculture domi-

nate in the east. Yet 80 percent of Magdalena Medio's economy comes from drugs; the fourth-largest drug crop in the country, some 50,000 acres of coca plants, provides the cocaine that finances the AUC and underpins the political power of regional narcotraffickers.

By summer's end, the AUC had routed the ELN from their Magdalena Medio strongholds, and after October's regional elections, Castano controlled the local administrations in 28 of Magdalena Medio's 29 municipalities. Barrancabermeja is No. 29.

Barrancabermeja is a young town, a raunchy, tough, independent, blue-collar town with an anarchist streak.

It is not the place you would pick to establish the bridgehead of a totalitarian regime. Pressure on military and police commanders from the international community and the U.S. Embassy is constant. Ambassador Anne Patterson has visited Barrancabermeja twice since December, accompanied both times by Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone. Now the senator and the ambassador maintain communication with local human rights activists. When alerted, Patterson calls the Barrancabermeja police chief.

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Support from diocesan workers, local activists and international NGOs all have been crucial to the daily effort to protect lives.

Yet as of the end of March, 200 people had been assassinated since the AUC moved in, and they are now in control of all but a handful of in the city's neighborhoods. The AUC is now targeting City Hall. If the current onslaught succeeds, and the municipal authorities lose their autonomy, Castano will have gained control of the port, the river, the access routes to the Magdalena valley—and the votes of a terrorized population come election time.

As I said good-bye to Bishop Prieto, he told me: "Colombia's worst enemy is this culture of illegality which is delegitimizing the government. Magdalena Medio is the mirror through which we will see whether the state is capable of eliminating all suspicion concerning its relations with these paramilitaries. Personally, that is why I feel so strongly about

the ELN 'peace zone.' That is where we will be able to measure the state's response."

Back in the second week of February, Gen. Martin Orlando Carreno, commander of the army brigade responsible for the region, attacked the AUC's regional base, located on a bluff overlooking the river 15 minutes from the city. The army found two bunkers, classrooms for political studies, a heliport for a fleet of helicopters, and five cocaine processing laboratories. Carreno's attack seemed to offer hope that at least one senior commander was willing to challenge the AUC.

But Castano's forces now have gone on the offensive against the ELN, blocking their agreement to start peace talks with the government. And Barrancabermeja is bleeding to death. Eduardo Cifuentes, Colombia's courageous ombudsman, says the city's human rights defenders are threatened with extinction: "The conscience of society is being murdered." ■

Buffalo Soldiers

By Kate McCoy

It's no secret that the war in Colombia is dirty. In the battle between guerrillas, the military and their paramilitary allies, it's estimated that civilians make up nearly 90 percent of the casualties. Each side justifies its targeting of civilians, claiming that the victims were collaborators with one side or the other. Just when it seemed there was no one left to accuse, the Colombian military found another group of rebel sympathizers who pose a threat to national security: livestock.

That's right. On March 26, two troops from the Colombian army's 14th Brigade, accompanied by three unidentified plainclothes men assumed to be paramilitaries, marched into a rural community and accused 143 buffalo of having ties to the guerrillas.

The animals had been purchased through a grant from the United Nations as part of a micro-development project for the community of Valle del Rio Cimitarra in northern Colombia's Magdalena Medio region. The local council of this community is well-organized and ran several successful economic projects—no small feat in a country where the majority of the population lives below the poverty line and unemployment in some areas is nearly 30 percent.

In February, the army launched an offensive in the region named "Operation Bolivar." The stated aim was to wipe out guerrilla activity in the area, but it amounted to a full-scale, multi-pronged attack on the civilian population, including aerial

bombardment and a massive ground mobilization involving 5,000 troops.

For the residents of Valle del Rio Cimitarra, Operation Bolivar meant an escalation of longtime military harassment. The army erected roadblocks outside the village and refused to allow any food or medicine to enter or leave the community. Even when a caravan of international, national and local officials attempted to bring food into the community, they were turned away by the army, which claimed the food was being delivered to guerrillas. A week later, after striking an agreement with the local military commander, the caravan made a second attempt to deliver food to the starving community. But they were besieged by paramilitaries, who stole the food and stashed it in an abandoned police headquarters. The army's 5,000 soldiers were conspicuously absent during this raid.

With no food coming in or out of the community, the army apparently decided to rob the community of its last remaining food source: the buffalo. The armed intruders claimed to have "proof" that the buffalo belonged to the guerrillas, and therefore could be confiscated. There is no legal argument here: Community leaders, the United Nations, and Colombian aid agencies all have records documenting the sale of the buffalo from a legitimate farm in the nearby city of Barrancabermeja to the City Council of Valle del Rio Cimitarra using U.N. funds.

Furthermore, when Operation Bolivar first started, Colombian organizations, which were

concerned for the safety of civilians and the integrity of the micro-development projects, showed the documents to Gen. Martin Orlando Carreno, who is in charge of all military operations in the region. At that time, Carreno assured the organizations that Valle del Rio Cimitarra would be allowed to continue with their projects without harassment.

"We don't know why the 14th Brigade is doing this," says a spokeswoman for the Program for Development and Peace in the Middle Magdalena, a Colombian organization that helped establish the buffalo project. "They know that the buffalo are the legal property of the United Nations."

One of the men who came with the 14th Brigade to steal the buffalo threatened local residents within earshot of the army personnel, saying "you should thank us for bringing the army with us. If they weren't here, things would have ended differently."

Of course, the question should be how this happened with the army right there. But this latest incident conforms to a pattern of state terrorism and complicity that has become the hallmark of the Colombian notion of "justice." It seems that no one is immune from this state-sponsored terror, whether union organizers, social workers or even buffalo.

One can only imagine what will happen when the army comes for the chickens. ■

Kate McCoy is the program assistant at Colombia Support Network in Madison, Wisconsin. She traveled to Magdalena Medio in February.

On the ATTAC

A new European alternative to globalization

By David Moberg

PARIS

As financial crisis swept across Asia in 1997, an editor at the prestigious French monthly magazine *Le Monde Diplomatique* wrote that the free movement of investment capital around the world was undermining democracy and "causing universal insecurity." But there was an alternative. As Nobel Prize-winning American economist James Tobin proposed back in the '70s, a tiny tax on financial transactions could dampen speculation while generating \$100 billion to \$200 billion a year that could be used to reduce global inequality and promote development. Author Ignacio Ramonet asked, "Why not set up a new worldwide non-governmental organization, Action for a Tobin Tax to Assist the Citizen?"

ATTAC was launched the following June (though the group's official name now translates as the "Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions to Assist the Citizen"). Since then ATTAC has grown rapidly beyond French borders, giving a new, sharper edge to the European response to globalization. That new movement is closer in spirit to U.S. and Canadian critics of global capitalism than to the Europe-oriented policies of many European unions and social democratic parties.

At a time when many pundits were writing off the left as dead, ATTAC gave new life and novel forms to traditional left ideals. This loose and decentralized network relies heavily on the Internet and several sympathetic publications to link ATTAC chapters, unions and citizen groups. Several of the country's labor federations have offered support but have kept some distance to avoid dominating the group. ATTAC also assiduously avoids alignment with political parties. Now claiming 30,000 members in 190 local groups in France plus offshoots in roughly two dozen other countries, ATTAC is becoming a global network. The group was instrumental in creating the World Social Forum that met in Porto Alegre, Brazil in late January (see "How To Confront Globalization," March 19).

ATTAC was formed primarily in reaction to what it calls the "dictatorship of the market" imposed by "financial globalization."



PASCAL GUYOT/AFP

In December, more than 50,000 union members and sympathizers marched on behalf of workers rights at an E.U. meeting in Nice.

The group argues not only for more regulation of the market, but preservation of a realm free from market values. "People feel there's a public sphere, a social sphere—something outside the market, where there is the republican principle of equality of opportunity," says ATTAC co-chairwoman Susan George.

Although it continues to push for the Tobin tax, which is gaining substantial support even among moderate politicians in much of Europe and Canada, ATTAC also campaigns against the World Trade Organization (especially new rules on trade in services that could threaten the public sector), tax havens, privatized pensions and genetically modified food. Resisting the easy label of being "anti-globalization," ATTAC leaders insist they favor greater global integration, but in a quite different way from that promoted by the International Monetary Fund, WTO and most European governments.

The growth of ATTAC reflects and encourages a growing disquiet with the new global economy among parts of the French labor movement as well as the broader public. In many ways, European unions have been less critical of corporate or financial globalization than American unions and workers, who face more aggressive anti-unionism and have fewer legal protections or safety nets. "A speech about globalization that

goes over well in North America comes across as a Trotskyist speech here," says John Evans, general secretary of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In general, European labor, including most of the French unions, held out hopes for a "social Europe" as the answer to the new global economy. They thought a unified Europe would strengthen European corporations as global competitors, while the European Union would guarantee workers rights, social welfare, redistribution of wealth and a "social partnership" that included labor across the continent. That strategy, combined with existing national legislation, has partly succeeded, saving European workers from some of the insecurity and inequality generated in the United States.

This has led many unions to focus on defending what they have, rather than attacking the new regime of corporate globalization. "Politically I'm concerned about globalization, but in practice we still have real protective legislation," argues Rafael Nedzyski, general secretary of the Food Workers of the Force Ouvriere (FO), one of the smaller labor federations. "We want to keep it. We benefit from it. U.S. labor may see more clear effects of globalization."

Nevertheless, Anne-Marie Perret, an FO colleague who is federal secretary of the civil servants union, notes that the pressures to privatize and deregulate, which threaten many public services and workers, come mainly from the common European market itself. "The challenge is to protect ourselves, to preserve the social conquests of our former leaders and members," she says. "We are not against the opening of markets, but states have to check what happens and not delegate the private sector to operate in its place."

But rather than a bulwark against globalization and free market fundamentalism, the European Union has become a stalking horse for privatization and "neoliberalism" in Europe as well as in global trade negotiations. In December, more than 50,000 union members and sympathizers marched on the E.U. meeting in Nice on behalf of a new social charter of workers rights. While the charter was adopted, it was quite weak and, because of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, almost did not recognize the right to strike. "For us Europe is not what we can dream about," Perret acknowledges. "This is not Europe for citizens, not Europe for social programs. It is more focused on financial and industrial challenges."

Widespread strikes in 1995 against cutbacks in the French welfare state first signified the growing public dissatisfaction with the free market policies of the French right and the European Union. Since then, the French public has showed greater concern about inequality, job insecurity, unemployment, threats to health care, education and French culture, and the safety and quality of food—from worries about genetic engineering or hormones in U.S. beef to multinational control of agriculture. "In this country, you touch the food, it's a revolution," says Christophe Aguiton, international affairs director of ATTAC and a leader in a new, more rank-and-file oriented labor federation, called SUD

(Solidarity, Unity, Democracy—which also plays on the French word for "south" and images of leisure).

The fight against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment raised new worries about corporate power, and the collapse of the MAI in 1998 raised hopes that financial globalization could be checked. In November 1999, there were more protesters against the WTO in the streets of France than there were in Seattle. "European unionism has not really been engaged in the fight against globalization," Aguiton contends. He sees the CFDT, a large labor federation that was once Catholic and later socialist, as having embraced much of the new free market policies in Europe.

But the new, more critical stance toward globalization is changing labor groups like SUD and the CGT, a labor federation historically linked to the declining French Communist Party. Both federations were founders of ATTAC. "We are out of the working-class paradigm," says Pierre Tartakowsky, an editor of a CGT magazine and general secretary of ATTAC, who argues that unions now have to work with a wide variety of non-governmental organizations, the unemployed, small farmers and environmentalists. Leaders of SUD—which was expelled from the CFDT in 1989 for being "too left"—see the U.S. labor movement of the last few years and its coalition work as representing what SUD is trying to do in fighting globalization, Aguiton adds.

Although some of the French critics of globalization, such as the small farmers, are often portrayed as nationalist or protectionist, ATTAC and the labor movement are ardently internationalist. Both want to protect French social gains and still hope to create a Europe that is more attuned to social needs and less an advocate of large corporations. European works councils mandated by the European Union for large companies so far have provided limited gains, but unions see a need for more Europe-wide and transnational bargaining, building on agreements recognizing core labor rights negotiated with a few European multinationals like Ikea and Statoil. "We refute the idea that it is possible for us and the working class to defend ourselves by invoking national rights and traditions," Tartakowsky says. "Now we need to globalize the resistance and the gains. We cannot gain any more in one country. We have to transnationalize rights and the building of wages, which doesn't mean we have to have the same wage everywhere for everyone."

Although still relatively small and institutionally weak, ATTAC represents a creative new force within European politics that is outside both political parties and the official labor movement. It is reinforcing trends within the European labor movement to take a more critical view of financial and corporate globalization and the limited gains that average citizens have made through the European Union. Most of all ATTAC has begun to counter what Susan George identifies as the main barrier to organizing, the "sense of inevitability" about contemporary capitalist globalization, by raising realistic hopes that "another world is possible." ■

Senior editor David Moberg is a fellow of The Nation Institute, which supported research for this article. His e-mail address is dmoberg@igc.org.

"We need to globalize the resistance and the gains. We cannot gain any more in one country."

Smoke Screen

Big Tobacco is working hard to ensure the whole world
will get its taste of freedom

By Tom Washington

HAMBURG, GERMANY

Fuhlsbüttel airport is a smoky place. Outside customs, a 10-foot statue of the Marlboro Man appears through the haze. He's neon lit and sports full cowboy regalia: Stetson, chaps, studs and a lasso at his hip. A branding-iron font over his head reads, "Taste the Freedom. Come to Marlboro Country." At first glance, he appears no different than any of the thousands of twisted promotional images that fragment our attention spans every day. Here in Hamburg, though, the Marlboro Man seems strangely out of place, a kitsch icon of another age. America may have driven the Marlboro Man out of town, but he's riding high in the rest of the world.

Around 35 percent of German adults smoke. The country has one of the highest smoking rates in Europe, just behind the two leaders, Poland and Russia. And Germany's love affair with tobacco and the Marlboro man doesn't seem to be waning, either. In 1998, the German Parliament defeated a bill that would have placed heavy restrictions on cigarette advertising and smoking in public areas and the workplace. Currently, Germany has no national tobacco control legislation.

When the Berlin Wall crumbled in 1989, Phillip Morris was one of the first major players to step in and offer the tired masses its taste of freedom. Big tobacco's subsequent boost in profits has been based largely on the ability to expand into the world's poorest and most populous countries and the know-how to find loopholes in government regulations against tobacco promotion. This two-pronged approach has allowed tobacco transnationals to storm through the Eastern Bloc and neighboring Baltic states faster than the blitzkrieg.

In the Czech Republic, for example, Phillip Morris made a successful \$413 billion dollar bid for AS Tabak, the state cigarette monopoly, gaining a firm hold on sales in Central Europe for decades to come. This 1992 venture was the largest single U.S. investment in a former Eastern Bloc country that year. Hamburg-based Reemtsma Tobacco, No. 4 among the world's major tobacco producers, was right behind them. Foreign business now accounts for more than 75 percent of Reemtsma sales, with markets in Asia and Central and Eastern Europe taking the lion's share. Last year the company's sales outside of Germany exceeded the 100 billion-cigarette mark for the first time.

Other numbers from the tobacco industry are on the rise as well. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates tobacco use is killing 4 million people a year worldwide. If left unchecked, the WHO reports the death toll will climb to 10 million annually by the year 2030. Seventy percent of these deaths will be in developing countries. The WHO also reports that by the year 2030 tobacco is expected to be the single biggest cause of death worldwide, outstripping heart disease and HIV by a significant margin. Despite these figures, Big Tobacco still does not accept responsibility for the ruined lives its products have caused.

In the United States, the past decade has been a PR nightmare for Big Tobacco. Growing consumer awareness about the harms of tobacco addiction and the simultaneous attempt by the tobacco companies to withhold damaging health-related evidence about their products resulted in a slew of billion-dollar lawsuits. Particularly damaging were last year's \$145 billion class-action lawsuit in Florida and Minnesota's \$6.1 billion settlement in 1998, which opened thousands of Phillip Morris documents to public scrutiny.

The subsequent drop in tobacco sales in the United States and government-imposed restrictions on cigarette advertising have forced Big Tobacco to assume a different marketing approach. The most visible change has been their apparent willingness to negotiate. Rather than assuming the familiar defensive stance about their products, they say they're ready to support FDA regulations. At Phillip Morris, this about-face in PR policy includes a \$100 million makeover campaign, in which it's portraying itself as a benign player in the global village under the guise of Kraft Foods, "corporate citizenship" and its "Youth Smoking Prevention" program.

Will the makeover work? Ray Rogers, director of the Corporate Campaign and an expert on consumer boycotts thinks not: "Phillip Morris having a bad reputation is not news, but the failure of a comprehensive and expensive public relations campaign to change people's minds reveals an irreversible credibility problem. It is doubtful that any PR firm could improve this corporation's image, based on its horrible record of destroying millions of people's lives, which it continues to

do. Phillip Morris took a gamble by highlighting its ownership with Kraft and has inspired widespread consumer revolt."

This anti-smoking campaign has now spread beyond U.S. borders. INFACT, a Boston-based corporate watchdog, led the effort to form the Network for Accountability of Tobacco Transnationals (NATT), a network of some 50 organizations from 30 countries that pushed the WHO to conduct hearings on the tobacco trade. A WHO panel discovered evidence of efforts to undermine and subvert international tobacco controls. They also found that Phillip Morris had been using its Kraft Foods subsidiary and other branch divisions to influence developing polices abroad to ban the promotion of tobacco products. Documents revealed that tobacco companies had been monitoring the WHO for nearly a quarter century and viewed it as one of their "leading enemies."

This evidence was first made public in the Minnesota lawsuit and then presented to the WHO in the Zeltner Report, a Swiss investigation into the tobacco industry's attempts to undermine WHO regulation. One memo from Phillip Morris CEO Geoffrey Bible cited in the report states: "[The WHO] has extraordinary influence on government and consumers and we must find a way to diffuse this and reorient their activities to their prescribed mandate." Bible goes on to say: "There is currently a vacancy in the WHO Food Safety Bureau; they are looking for an industry expert to be 'donated' to the WHO to act as a liaison with business. If there is someone at Kraft/GF who possesses the skills, we should consider offering his or her services."

The WHO is now trying to persuade nearly 200 countries to support the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), a treaty that would severely limit tobacco advertising and sponsorship programs in the global marketplace. It also seeks to give governments more control over the tobacco industry, in everything from creating alternative agriculture programs to monitoring all aspects of the industry's activities. "Tobacco corporations, led by Phillip Morris, have been using their political influence across the globe to spread addiction and death," says Lucinda Wykle-Rosenberg, research director for INFACT. "The FCTC treaty is our best opportunity to put public health before tobacco profits."

While few people envision the billion-dollar litigation suits witnessed in America over the past few years, many offi-

cials hope that some sort of unified, international policy could be put into place as soon as 2003. NATT is optimistic about this uphill battle. But according to a September 2000 article in the *Legal Times*, the three major multinational tobacco companies—British American Tobacco, Japan Tobacco and Phillip Morris—have "taken their case against the treaty directly to most of the 192 countries involved in drafting the FCTC document."

Preventable deaths and disease should be cause enough

for each of these countries to take action against Big Tobacco. But tobacco interests have been ingenious in constructing myths about tobacco's place in the global marketplace as a tax revenue generator and job supplier, the sort of things that finance ministers and development agencies love to hear. Any reduced demand for cigarettes, tobacco companies argue, would rapidly cause unemployment and revenue loss. They've argued this point long enough that in many countries it's accepted as conventional wisdom.

In the former Eastern Bloc, where many countries are still strapped with severe economic and social problems, turning your back on tobacco isn't so simple. In Hungary, for example, where 40 percent of adults smoke, the government is struggling to fund health services strapped with a 150 percent increase in lung cancer cases among men and a 200 percent increase among women in the past decade. Big Tobacco has stepped in to fund some health services because it lends government and citizens the impression that they are actively working for the common good. This PR boost may aid Big Tobacco in the coming battle over restrictions such as the FCTC.

Britain's *Guardian* recently reported a story about a small town clinic in Hungary that treated patients for lung cancer and tobacco-related diseases while also accepting sponsorship from British American Tobacco, which operated a cigarette factory just down the street. A similar scenario has occurred in the United States, where multibillion-dollar settlements with state and federal governments result in peculiar circumstances. They helped turn tobacco executives and health advocates into unlikely partners as big tobacco soon became one of the country's biggest underwriters of smoking-related health programs.

Other countries in Eastern Europe have reported the same forms of so-called "sponsorship," where tobacco firms pose as a kind of sugar daddy in everything from funding medical



The Marlboro Man is still riding high in places like the Czech Republic.

SEAN GALLUP/IAISON/NEWSMAKERS

"The treaty is our best opportunity to put public health before tobacco profits."

Britain's *Guardian* recently reported a story about a small town clinic in Hungary that treated patients for lung cancer and tobacco-related

diseases while also accepting sponsorship from British American Tobacco, which operated a cigarette factory just down the street. A similar scenario has occurred in the United States, where multibillion-dollar settlements with state and federal governments result in peculiar circumstances. They helped turn tobacco executives and health advocates into unlikely partners as big tobacco soon became one of the country's biggest underwriters of smoking-related health programs.

Other countries in Eastern Europe have reported the same forms of so-called "sponsorship," where tobacco firms pose as a kind of sugar daddy in everything from funding medical

research to city parks. Even Switzerland, Europe's icon of government and social efficiency, has reported numerous activities in which big tobacco has thwarted national legislation against advertising. In January, a report by the WHO and University of California revealed that tobacco influence-peddling had reached the Swiss hospitality industry as part of a strategy to thwart measures against smoking in restaurants, work and public places. Subsequently, a pair of national bills to ban cigarette advertising were rejected by Swiss voters in 1979 and 1993. The Swiss government has yet to introduce tobacco advertising bans and smoke-free policies.

Despite all of the PR and political maneuvering, Big Tobacco must still work hard to attract new customers because so many of the old ones are dying out. Most of these new recruits are children, the target group of what one recently released Phillip Morris document referred to as "replenishment pools." Ninety percent of those who start smoking are under 20. And while Phillip Morris insists they're trying to prevent youth smoking, company documents spell out a different strategy. In one such document, former Phillip Morris senior vice president Ellen Merlo stated: "If we don't do something fast to project that sense of industry responsibility regarding the youth access issue, we're going to be looking at severe marketing restrictions in a very short time. Those restrictions will pave the way for equally severe legislation on where adults are allowed to smoke."

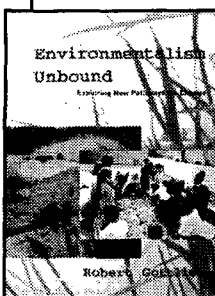
Indeed, tobacco companies have developed a sophisticated network of promotional tools to lure kids into a lifelong habit.

In Europe, they've sponsored Harley-Davidson giveaways and rock concert promotions. Throughout Germany and Eastern Europe, outdoor cafés and public parks sport massive umbrellas with Marlboro or West cigarette logos pasted all over them. Germany's sporting superstar, the three-time Formula One racing champion Michael Schumacher, is a walking advertisement: His uniform and car are smeared with the Marlboro logo, top to bottom.

Cinemas have at least 15 minutes of commercials before the feature film, and tobacco companies have captured the niche market in quick fashion. The Marlboro Man is still riding in front of snow-capped mountains in the mythic West before he stops for a cigarette break, and Joe Camel is still getting his share of babes in the sack. One of the longest running Player cigarette promotions here shows a woman reaching orgasm in a restaurant while a man across the room strokes his cigarette with his forefinger and thumb. The action comes to a frustrating end when the cigarette accidentally breaks in half.

Big Tobacco claims that its marketing campaigns are not aimed at minors. For adults, they say, smoking is a matter of individual choice, and governments shouldn't infringe on this freedom. But Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, director of the WHO, believes tobacco companies are directly responsible for the choices young people are making about smoking. "Tobacco addiction is a disease communicated through advertising, sports, marketing and sponsorship," she insists. "This is not free choice at all." ■

Tom Washington is a freelance writer based in Hamburg.



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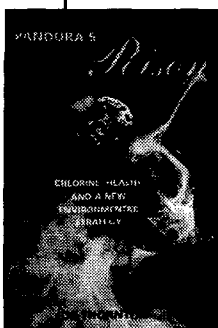
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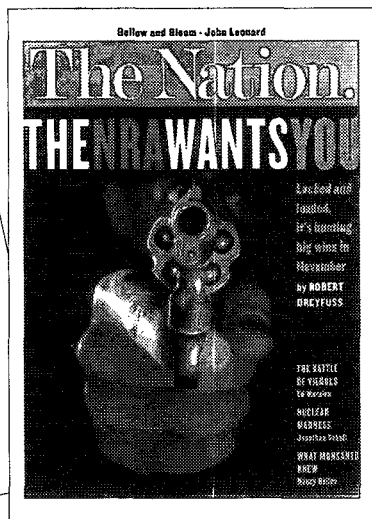
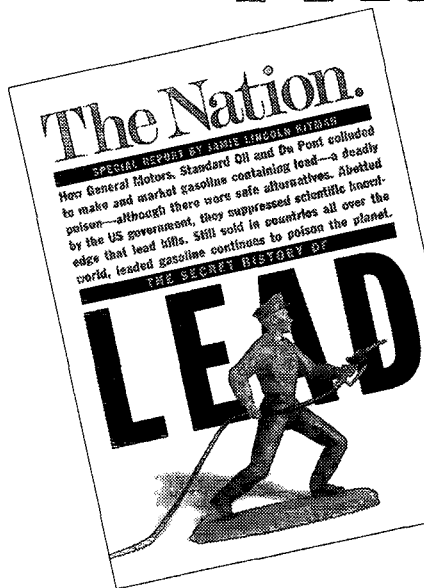
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Christopher's Kind

By Joe Knowles

It has been my amazing and good luck to have a job at this magazine with the expansive title of "culture editor." I get paid to investigate the ongoing ramifications of an ancient

**Unacknowledged Legislation:
Writers in the Public Sphere**
By Christopher Hitchens
Verso
358 pages, \$25

proposition, probably best stated by Percy Shelley, that goes like this: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

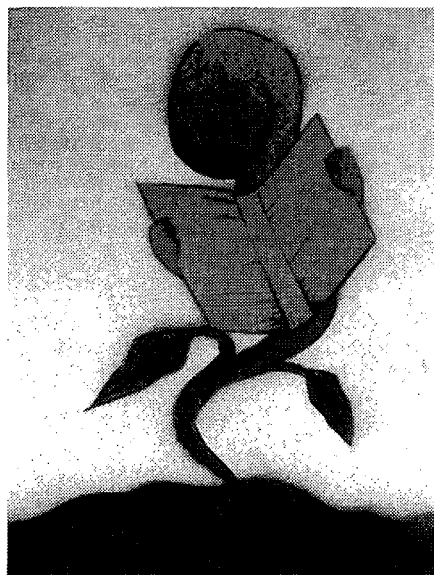
Keeping track of such legislation is great fun, but it's not quite as easy as chalking up food safety to *The Jungle* or the end of slavery to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For one, sometimes (though not always) the best of the unacknowledged legislators prefer to *stay that way*, ostensibly wanting only to deliver the goods of a great story or memorable song. Likewise, you've got to watch out for those energetic fakes who, forever bathing in righteousness and self-acknowledgment, tend to disqualify themselves from any hope of *unacknowledgment*.

Besides, the very mettle of Shelley's defense of poetry often seems in doubt. For every vindicated political artist like Vaclav Havel, history offers countless more forgotten and persecuted geniuses. "The sword, as we have reason to know, is often much mightier than the pen," writes Christopher Hitchens in the foreword to *Unacknowledged Legislation*, his new essay collection. But Hitchens, who is famously unburdened by superstition, does have one profound faith: "Every tank, as Brecht said, has a crucial flaw. Its driver. Suppose that driver has read something good lately, or has a decent song or poem in his head ..."

While there is no substitute for political action and organizing, those occasional and splendid triumphs (great and small) do get their inspiration and cultural momentum—and very worth-while in the first place—from somewhere. *Unacknowledged Legislation* is the work of an entertaining and humane writer carefully locating that

somewhere—for "properly understood and appreciated, literature need never collide with, or recoil from, the *agora*." Hitchens finds it in the caustic verse of Dorothy Parker and the dangerous wit of Oscar Wilde; in the sailing stories of Patrick O'Brian and the kiddie tales of Roald Dahl; in Gore Vidal's historical sweep and Arthur Conan Doyle's airtight deductions. And of course, he also finds it in the real world, most obviously with the case of Salman Rushdie.

This book of essays, sometimes very funny and sometimes very moving, ought to dispel an endlessly promulgated and stupid myth about Hitchens, that of



the loose cannon, the wicked fop only out to win attention and notoriety by flaying the random whipping boy—or even whipping nun! Why else would he give a book a frightful title like *The Missionary Position: Mother Theresa in Theory and Practice*? (Because she wasn't all she's cracked up to be, and it's a justly hilarious title.) Or "rat out" on his colleague Sidney Blumenthal for spreading lies about a certain White House intern? (Because the president's men aren't supposed to get away with it, even if they are old chums.) Or devote two extremely long and assiduously documented articles in *Harper's Magazine* amassing the legal

case against that eminent philosopher-king, Henry Kissinger? (Because, not incidentally, he is a war criminal.) But in the lazy world of received opinion and unfailing servitude to power, these parentheticals—rooted in *actual principles*, imagine that—simply do not compute.

Alas, much in *Unacknowledged Legislation* will not compute either, not to that abject pack who habitually check their flank for an approving cue. In fact the book's contents haven't computed already, as all of these essays have appeared before in sundry magazines and journals. It's the herd's loss. Here's Hitchens, in an aside to a warm tribute to Dorothy Parker: "Mr. Benchley once observed that the joy of being a *Vanity Fair* contributor was this: you could write about any subject you liked, no matter how outrageous, as long as you said it in evening clothes. (I have devoted my professional life to the emulation of this fine line.)" And so he has. Hitchens can speak clearly and with velvety aplomb to any reader, at least any reader not willfully wedded to prejudice and conventional wisdom.

With an unusual range for a lefty journo-academic—he refuses to bow to the dictates of specialization or expectation—his byline glides effortlessly from *Vanity Fair* to *Dissent*, where we find a plum essay on "Oscar Wilde's Socialism." Like Hitchens himself, both Wilde and socialism are often misunderstood. It is to Hitchens' credit that he counters the common and superficial assessment of Wilde—for some strange reason, prevalent even among "earnest" progressives—as a charming but weak dandy with little politics of substance (even if he was a queer martyr). But no:

In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* ... [Wilde] had shown the Victorian attitude towards marriage as an exercise in the mean-spirited preservation of private property, as well as a manifestation of sexual repression and hypocritical continence. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the same polemical objective is pursued, but by satirical means. Absurd and hilarious dialogues about betrothal, inheritance, marriage settlements, and financial dispositions are the energy of the play. Everybody is sup-



posed to marry for money and give up liberty; everybody is constrained to pretend that they are marrying for love or romance.

Again and again throughout *Unacknowledged Legislation*—his ruminations on Gore Vidal and George Orwell are good examples—Hitchens finds himself awestruck at this type of keen blend of aesthetic mastery and political concern. Unlike so many of his smug colleagues, Hitchens knows when he is confronted with a work of genius. And sometimes, this does entail setting aside certain nasty personal details of the authors involved; handily dispatching an ignorant attack on T.S. Eliot, Hitchens warns: “Hesitate once, hesitate twice, hesitate a hundred times before employing political standards as a device for the analysis and appreciation of poetry.”

But neither is Hitchens content to pretend that the republic of letters has no legislature; instead he seeks a constructive understanding. In a rich piece on the “thwarted fascist” Philip Larkin, Hitchens writes that the poet first won the affection of the British public not because of his rather disagreeable personal traits (which didn’t become public knowledge until much later), but because of his “attention to ordinariness, to quotidian suffering and to demotic humour. Decaying communities, old people’s homes, housing estates, clinics ... he mapped these much better than most social democrats, and he found words for experience.” In grappling with flawed writers like this (Roald Dahl, Rudyard Kipling and H.L. Mencken are also among those represented), Hitchens shows himself to be a searching and even empathetic critic, admirably capable of what he argues for: “an authentic engagement with the sources of reaction.”

Crucially, however, Hitchens does not extend the same courtesy to other sorts of reactionaries, namely the dim or the plain irritating—those who, in short, fail to find adequate “words for experience.” And why be polite about it? Here he is on the grimly macho faux-utilitarianism of Connor Cruise O’Brien: “The Cruiser should be made to read [his] book, which would quite possibly be for the first time.

Then he should be asked to eat it. Then he should agree, without sentimentality or sickly compassion, to make a utilitarian sacrifice for suffering humanity, and pitch himself over the side.” Or how about this, on the shoddy and overrated carpentry of Tom Wolfe: “The scene-shifters don’t even bother to ease themselves off-stage. They hang about, picking their noses and nudging each other to give warning of the action to come.” Or inevitably, the ghastly Norman Podhoretz, who “has always himself sought to ease the life of the book reviewer. He does this small but welcome favour by making all his faults crashingly apparent from the very first page.”

One objection: The scope of *Unacknowledged Legislation* is wide, but, as a fairly representative sample of Hitchens’ past decade of cultural writing, one cannot help but wonder how it is that his critical curiosity seems to desert him when it comes to women writers. We get substantive discussions of Dorothy Parker (positive) and Martha Nussbaum (negative), but that’s about it. I’m not a PC cop, but the consistency of this omission is pretty striking after sitting

down to absorb some 35 essays. Straightaway, at least two very engaged fiction writers immediately come to mind who would have been ideal subjects. Carolyn Chute, the sharp and politically hard-to-pin-down chronicler of the Maine backwoods, seems a natural candidate for Hitchensian analysis. And his friend Susan Sontag, who, with varying degrees of acknowledgement, has made very public stands on behalf of the legislative artist in the past decade, seems conspicuously absent from the collection.

But *Unacknowledged Legislation* does not purport to be inclusive, and to complain otherwise would be to miss the point. The aggregate of these attractive essays amounts to a handbook on what otherwise might be a deadly dull topic: writerly engagement with the public sphere. Hitchens has a wonderful faith in the power of art—“our slight and sardonic hope.” And this is that rare breed of faith, one that has hard evidence of its secular miracles. ■

Joe Knowles, the culture editor of *In These Times*, can be reached at knowles@inthesetimes.com.

I’ve Got a Secret To Tell

By S.L. Wisenberg

When I was young—and even now, sometimes—I would imagine that I had been transported inside a friend’s body and was expected to carry out that person’s life. I wondered how well I would be able to fig-

The Forbidden Stories of Marta Veneranda

By Sonia Rivera-Valdés
Seven Stories Press
158 pages, \$21.95

ure out what to do and how to react. It was terrifying and delicious to contemplate.

That we are imprisoned in our own bodies and consciousness is part of the human condition. We hunger for reports from terra incognita. Just about all literature provides this news from inside; *The Forbidden Stories of Marta Veneranda* provides it with special intensity.

This collection of linked stories, which was first published in Spanish and won the 1997 Casa de Las Américas prize for the Short Story, could also be considered a novel, in nine pieces. The conceit is that the fictional Marta Veneranda Castillo Ovando has collected interviews with 178 people on “the disparity between what human beings commonly consider shameful to tell about their lives and the ignominy of the deed itself.” The stories were to become her dissertation in an unnamed field, but because the details were not quantifiable, she broke with her scientific-minded professor. Displaying the pluckiness of some of the characters in the stories, she changed her field and received her Ph.D. anyway. After explaining all this in a prefatory note, she presents to the reader nine representative transcripts.

In those stories, the narrator all but disappears, awash in other people’s

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lives. We in turn become privy to the labyrinthine thought processes and life stories of the interviewees. We may not become them, but we become the gatherer of the tales. Marta Veneranda is us.

It becomes apparent that interviews are with people who are friends of friends. Most have a connection with Iris, a lawyer, whose secret relationship with Veneranda is hinted at in the end. Almost all are Cuban exiles in New York, all but two are women. They articulate their own reasons for speaking of the forbidden, and we should or shouldn't take the explanations at face value. A couple of them say they need to talk because the secret experience shook up their previous notions about their own identities. One is too ashamed to tell his therapist, because the two of them are old friends and he's afraid "he'll think I've gone crazy." Another tells because she wants an opinion. One claims that telling her story will help her own writing; another wants absolution; and others, to exorcise obsessions.

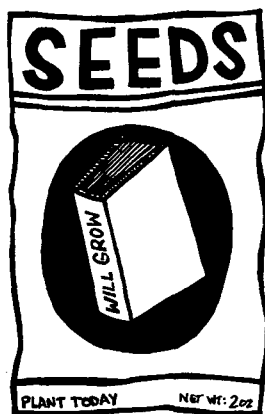
It used to be that the therapist was the secular priest. Here that role is taken up by the interviewer. No one in these stories mentions the Roman Catholic confessional—when they speak of religion, it is mostly in the context of the past, in Cuba.

What do they talk about when they talk about the forbidden? Here are the goods, without giving too much away: A man has sex with a 400-pound neighbor whose terrible stench is transformed into an enticing aroma. A gay man doesn't tell his lover that he watches pornography—hetero pornography—to become aroused. A woman offers her body for sex to save a friend's job. One woman admits to killing her husband; another wants assurance that she did not kill hers, accidentally on purpose.

Women find themselves attracted to other women, and act upon it or do not. When they do become involved with other women, they often find sexual satisfaction: "I caressed and kissed every piece and fold of that body with an intensity and passion I had never put into my love-making before, and she reciprocated with furious splendor." Men can satisfy, too, but rarely husbands: "Outside myself, in orgasms that seemed to last eternities, enormous red poppies blossomed in an

instant before my closed eyes. That is not a metaphor. I saw those flowers each time I came, and I was happy."

This is not the instant and ersatz intimacy of TV talk shows. These characters don't blurt out their secrets, aren't introduced with labels. Although some of the encounters they speak of could be classified as "quickies," the stories these characters tell are long and complex. Besides, Veneranda's people are more articulate, introspective, well-educated and better off than the typical guest of Oprah or Jerry Springer. We must settle back and take the journey with Veneranda, waiting to see what is



Nine linked forays into emotional terra incognita.

revealed, rather than what is extracted.

Rivera-Valdés is as skilled as a good lover in building anticipation. At the end of the last story I was trembling with her delays—the interviewee has said that she avoided sex upon meeting her object of desire, Rocío, in New York, because the other woman was so much younger. She changes her mind, and visits Rocío in Cuba. But first—she must call her potential lover's neighbor because she doesn't have a phone, must have a long conversation with her hostess, climb a narrow staircase.

Then she reports: "She took off the pale pink satin robe I'd given her in

New York. The glow of that cloth on the bed accented the raggedness of the sheets on which we were about to make love." And they do. After some talking. Specifically, after they speak to one another in the words that the older woman used to hear from Cuban men, while she herself said nothing. Now they both speak, and both are satisfied.

But not all of the narrative tension is sexual. Rivera-Valdés brings us near to the precipice, making me suspect, for example, that one character would go blind (she doesn't). In another story, growing attraction leads to ... no action. And yet the speaker is deeply touched. And as it becomes clear early on that these people know one another, I was waiting for further links—for the gay narrator to be the gay lover in another story (he isn't).

Rivera-Valdés is playful and witty. These are secrets, and yet the joke's on the interviewer, and us. A secret told with great fanfare becomes a passing phrase in the next story or chapter. Are these true confessors dissembling? Or are we to imagine they feel freer to open up to their friends after unburdening themselves to Marta Veneranda?

Hovering over most of these stories is Cuba—as haunting as childhood, as backdrop to childhood. "Your being Cuban makes me remember things," Mayté tells the narrator, and both she and the next subject, Rodolfo, talk of their trauma as children in Operation Pedro Pan, in which anti-Castro parents sent their young to the United States, not joining their offspring until years later in some cases. She also describes in rich detail the emigres' lot: working early on in factory jobs that lead to independence, then white-collar jobs that take away from roots.

Often the characters long for the island of their youth. A man says of his small hometown: "where they grow wonderful potatoes and citrus fruits, time moves slowly, and nothing happens." Other exiles leave lovers left behind, and the sea, and "the smell of tropical rainy days." When one woman returns to Cuba she thinks, in English, "My God ... Cuban swallows, and all the grass to be seen is Cuban grass."



Cuba as motherland looms especially over the last story, when the interviewee makes black-and-white distinctions between the irrational and the scientific. She much prefers the first category over the rationality of her "white" psychiatrist husband; she finds things Cuban and Latino more homey and fulfilling. She follows the old superstitions—bathes twice on San Juan's day so she won't get worms—but is catholic in her tastes, examining her dreams for meaning, consulting a melting pot of esoteric reference books, visiting a spiritualist and an herbalist, finding solace in *mofongo con chicharrones*—"mashed plantains with crackling, which I hadn't had for years, ever since I had started with holistic health." When her hus-

band fails to respond to her desires for spicier sex—he's jealous of a fluorescent orange dildo as if it were "a real penis inside of me," she looks elsewhere, settling down with another Cuban-American woman.

Although at times the details fall into tedium, for the most part *The Forbidden Stories of Marta Veneranda* is a wonderful voyeuristic journey.

What is it that women want? What do we all want? To be listened to. To be known. Deeply. ■

S.L. Wisenberg's short story collection, *The Sweetheart Is In*, has just been published by TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern University Press. She also maintains a Web site, www.slwisenberg.com.

luxury not available to the typical low-wage worker. She also resolves to have a car at all times—either her own or a rental model procured with a credit card. "I just figured that a story about waiting for buses would not be very interesting to read," she says, as if a story about working as a waitress or a maid is inherently gripping. It's not, of course; the trick is in the telling. A strict desire for verisimilitude would have compelled her to do without these two conveniences, especially the car. Maneuvering between affordable housing and the workplace is a logistical nightmare for many Americans, given the shoddy state of public transportation.

These quibbles aside, the results of Ehrenreich's experiment are rife with keen sociological insights. As a maid, she witnesses the odd mixture of paranoia and obliviousness with which the upper classes regard those who buff their floors and polish their porcelain. As a waitress, she notes that she and her co-workers "utilize whatever bits of autonomy we have to ply our customers with the illicit calories that signal our love. ... [We] control the number of butter patties our customers get and the amount of sour cream on their baked potatoes. So if you wonder why Americans are so obese, consider the fact that waitresses both express their humanity and earn their tips through the covert distribution of fats."

Later, in Minneapolis, she applies for jobs at Menard's and Wal-Mart, which require her to pass a drug test. This spooks her because "there has been a chemical indiscretion in recent weeks, and I'm not at all sure I can pass." Why do these mega-retailers care if their employees roll a joint to unwind on the weekend? Essentially, the test's purpose is to put the employee on the defensive from the beginning. It's a bit like installing an "anti-theft device" at the entry to a store. Now and then it will beep randomly (just as drug tests will sometimes erroneously come back positive), and it casts suspicion on all who enter, giving capital a psychological edge.

Capital has other strategies to maintain its domination. Help-wanted ads run perpetually to ensure a steady stream of applicants, even when no jobs

Going Undercover

By Philip Connors

While researching her latest book, Barbara Ehrenreich performed what the millennial culture of greed must surely regard as an experiment in insanity: She embarked on a course of intentional downward mobility. At a time when a reader of the business pages couldn't scan three paragraphs without bumping

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America
By Barbara Ehrenreich
Metropolitan Books
221 pages, \$23

into the adjective "high-flying," she decided to see what life was like for those who stock shelves, scrub toilets, serve food and generally do the heavy lifting of the American economy.

Nickel and Dimed thus emerges as a welcome corrective to all the breathless gushing about the new economy, the end of the business cycle and the inexorable expansion of the investor class. Granted, the business press, smelling fear among the markets, has rushed to cover the slaughter of the bulls in recent months. But the sad stories it tells generally involve paper millionaires whose fortunes went up in smoke, or market analysts whose reputations have tanked. What happened

to the human guinea pigs of welfare reform? No one in the coddled corporate media seems to know. What's life like for workers on a single-digit hourly wage? No one seems to care.

Ehrenreich became a wage slave at the behest of *Harper's* editor Lewis Lapham, who, Ehrenreich sheepishly tells us, made the suggestion over a "comparatively sumptuous" lunch of salmon and field greens in a Manhattan bistro. Soon thereafter she was on the other side of the server-customer exchange, in a Key West restaurant that was a far cry from the "understated country-French style" surroundings where the project was hatched.

Her goal was simple. She wanted to see whether she could venture off on her own, find adequate housing and match income to expenses at the \$6 or \$7 per hour that a substantial share of the American work force earns. Granted, her experiment was far from pure. She's a native English speaker, has a Ph.D. and is in good health. These attributes already give her vast advantages over much of the low-wage work force, though she fudges the extent of her education on application forms.

Other advantages, though, give her project less urgency than it might have had. She keeps an ATM card handy in case she runs out of money for food, a

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are available—thus issuing a subtle threat to employees who dare question wages or working conditions. Employers rig the application process so that when jobs are open, prospective hires move directly from paperwork and personality tests to orientation, bypassing any opportunity for negotiation of pay or benefits. And, naturally, unions are bad-mouthed as corrupt, collectivist, Bolshevik bureaucracies at odds with core American values.

Affordable housing, though, is an even bigger problem for the working poor, many of whom don't have the up-front money needed to pay a deposit and first and last month's rent. This relegates many to pay-by-the-week (or even by-the-day) residence motels, which can eat up half or more of take-home earnings. Others live three or four to a room, or even in their vehicles. As the overall economy soars, the housing crunch only worsens as new wealth drives up property values for rich and poor alike.

Ehrenreich offers no panaceas to these problems. But she does a service merely by showing how grindingly difficult it is to make ends meet. Even she couldn't do it, eventually falling back on various pre-arranged safety nets—and she possessed advantages others only dream of. She also gives us candid glimpses into the lives of her low-wage colleagues, who are smarter, wittier and more resourceful than the rare media exposé makes them out to be.

And her final point is one worth pondering amid the cascade of numbers telling us Americans have never had it better: "The 'working poor,' as they are approvingly termed, are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high. To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor, to everyone else." ■

Philip Connors is editor of the literary magazine *Croonenberghs' Fly*, whose first issue will be published this spring. His e-mail address is pjcbbackwoods@hotmail.com.

Conspiracy of Theory

By Jonathan Cook

Mike Davis is one of the fiercer flamethrowers of the American left: His influential books *City of Quartz* and *Ecology of Fear* skillfully dismantled the urban myths of Los Angeles and the utopian dreams of California. Now, after spending so much time on the contemporary

but of "growing social vulnerability to climate variability."

The colonialist transformation of local agriculture into a cash-crop export system played an essential role in worsening that vulnerability, as Davis shows. Small holders were tied to the world market—and then often strangled by it. Take the example of an Indian farmer who once produced enough rice and vegetables to feed his family, and perhaps to sell or barter a small surplus. Financially pressured to grow crops for export, he became indirectly dependent on trade quotas and fluctuating commodity prices. When oversupply and competition pushed those prices down, he was unable to shift easily to alternatives. Marooned at the peripheries of the world economy, such small farmers were nevertheless still buffeted by the shocks of distant markets rippling around the globe.

But the shift away from subsistence farming had a devastating effect on people's basic ability to survive hard times. In a country like Indonesia, the move to monocultures (growing a single crop) disrupted diverse agricultural strategies that had evolved to cope with the unpredictability of the monsoon. Likewise, the traditional granary reserve systems of India and China, a safety valve in lean years, were forced to shut down—mostly to cut costs or placate opponents of such communitarianism. So when El Niño caused a drought, people starved in their villages.

And since the rules of political economy were sovereign in a place like British India, the death toll soared. Shockingly, exporting surpluses from a hungry nation was a common practice of British colonial policy; Davis notes that "between 1875 and 1900, years that included the worst famines in Indian history, annual grain exports increased from 3 million to 10 million tons: a quantity ... equivalent to the annual nutrition of 25 million people." Lord Lytton, the British viceroy in India and one of the book's nastier villains, believed that relief aid only encouraged indolence among the natives. Davis cat-

Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World

By Mike Davis

Verso

464 pages, \$27

West Coast, Davis has gone hunting in the archives. *Late Victorian Holocausts* excavates a forgotten and chilling history: the wave of famines that struck India, China, Brazil and other tropical countries in the late 19th century, as a result of which more than 50 million people perished from hunger and disease—a death toll approximately equal to that of World War II.

Researchers now think that El Niño, the cyclical fluctuations of temperature and air pressure in the equatorial Pacific so familiar from recent headlines, was particularly active at that time as well. As Davis details, this led to repeated failures of the monsoon rains and to terrible droughts across the tropics. But he's not out just to talk about the weather. His devastating thesis is that "El Niño worked in sinister partnership with the world market."

Far from being the unfortunate lot of tropical peasants, these mass starvations were directly linked to the policies of European colonialism—reaching its zenith at that time—and to the emergence of a truly global economy. The book's main contention is that while droughts can't be avoided, famines can; they're actually social crises created by the interaction of climate with socioeconomic conditions, public policies and land-use practices. Indian and Chinese farmers were victims not of a malicious Mother Nature,



alogues the appalling results of such inaction through gruesome photographs and the graphic accounts of contemporary travelers and officials.

Famines were a good opportunity to strengthen the colonial balance of power, weakening local autonomy everywhere from New Caledonia (still a French possession today) to South Africa. The Dutch used drought periods to suppress recalcitrant tribes on Borneo and turn them into rattan exporters. And in the Philippines, where severe El Niño episodes coincided with the advent of American imperialism, the United States cut off food sources to subjugate resistance, trying out a strategy used more than half a century later in Vietnam.

Prior to the 19th century, Asia was nearly as wealthy as Europe. But instead of developing internal markets and infrastructure, colonialism spirited profits out of the colonies. India held up the setting sun of the British empire by providing low-cost raw materials and absorbing finished goods (it was "the greatest captive market in world history"), ensuring that free trade for some involved managed trade for others—what Davis sardonically calls "Victorian structural adjustment."

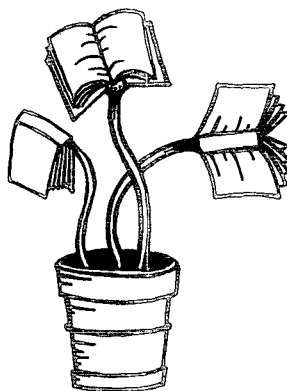
Late *Victorian Holocausts* is powerful and well argued; it's also an impressive work of scholarship, demonstrating the author's ability to move fluidly through academic waters, juggling scholarly articles and period sources with ease. And even while wheeling out plenty of hard statistical evidence, Davis strives to maintain a personal element, arguing that "it is necessary to pin names and faces to the human agents of such catastrophes."

Although he is clearly aware of the long-term effects that the famines had on contemporary underdevelopment—the book's subtitle is "El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World"—Davis does not intend to draw those parallels himself. Unlike his more contemporary efforts, this book's historical focus may largely confine it to a specialist audience. That would be a shame, because it's hard to read such damning stuff without a striking sense of its relevance today.

For these great interlocking movements of natural disasters, poverty,

hunger and globalization have only intensified in scope. In the late 20th century, we saw a similarly dramatic increase in severe El Niño cycles, and related events like floods, droughts and forest fires; almost all scientists believe that global warming is worsening their effects. Meanwhile, with the international economy more tightly bound than ever, trade liberalization, commodity prices and exchange rates are structurally adjusting the lives of people around the world. Sustainable agriculture in Asia, Africa and Latin America continues to be absorbed into a global network of monoculture plantations that grow cash crops (like flowers or coffee) for export.

"Despite three decades of rapidly expanding global food supplies, there are still an estimated 786 million hungry people in the world," writes Peter Rosset, co-director of Food



First/The Institute for Food and Development Policy. Much-touted increases in food production, like that achieved by the Green Revolution of the 1960s, often mask the need for changes in distribution—for it's the misallocation of food and resources like water and land, not their scarcity, that perpetuates world hunger. In a depressing update to one of Davis' case studies, Rosset reports that 5,000 Indian children are dying of malnutrition each day, despite national grain surpluses. This further highlights the desperate need for

a social ecology that places environmental crises in the context of socioeconomic disparity—between rich and poor, but also between North and South.

In today's world, multinational corporations, aided by development institutions, patent lawyers and, sadly, corrupt local elites, have replaced colonial bureaucrats. Hunger has become a useful way for corporations to ratchet up profits. Biotech firms are now busy preaching the virtues of genetically modified seeds, which they claim will finally solve the problem of Third World hunger. The U.S. government recently donated a large shipment of genetically modified food to alleviate a famine in northern Kenya—using hunger as a vector by which to create and control markets for a profitable new technology. Relief aid itself rarely addresses the root causes of famines in the very nature of the global economy. In the 19th century, natives were accused of laziness and denied handouts; now aid is used as a way of easing our consciences while creating new markets—which hurts local farmers even more, and may lead to further famines down the road.

The debate will continue over whether the solution to the world's hunger problem is more and better globalization, or the revitalization of local economies. Meanwhile, as in the colonial era, an enormous number of people are suffering. And arguing that the hungry must wait while their leaders make wrenching structural changes dictated by a particular economic program sounds a lot like the sacrifices once demanded by Mao or Stalin. One kind of dogma has merely replaced another.

Like Victorian colonialists, today's globalizing elites may sincerely believe they're doing the right thing, that free markets will eventually feed the planet. But to deny the obvious increase in human misery around the world is to be complicit in it. Davis' book is essentially one of moral outrage, rightly scathing toward the undue consideration given to theories—of any kind—over lives. ■

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Everybody's In On It

By Chris Barsanti

John F. Kennedy's long, vague shadow just refuses to recede. Regardless of his actual achievements, his legacy has long ranked up there in the public mind with those of Washington, Lincoln and FDR. Besides

The Cold Six Thousand

By James Ellroy

Knopf

711 pages, \$26.95

coming along at a flashpoint in American history, he was young, attractive and, of course, tragic. The line on JFK's life was a great story, full of idealism and struggle, and the story of his death, packed to the gills with intrigue, ugly characters and a dark axis of hard-edged Cold War fanaticism is an even greater one. Movie studios wish they could dream up something like that.

When Hollywood finally did, in Oliver Stone's druggy, labyrinthine opus of the assassination, it helped ensure that the man's legacy would continue to grow by giving even those who never particularly cared about JFK an epic, endlessly involving mystery in which everything is alleged and nothing proven. The assassination becomes a Möbius strip of detail and accusation that you can follow forever and still end up right back at your starting point, with nothing but the fuzzy idea of a dead president and a general sense of doom.

James Ellroy's 1995 novel, *American Tabloid*, was a typically tangly tale of madmen and mobsters that sped from 1958 right up to November 22, 1963 over 576 densely packed pages. It started with Howard Hughes mainlining codeine, bopped right along through the tumultuous 1960 election, the Bay of Pigs, Sam Giancana and the whole Chicago-Vegas Mafia scene and fed all its characters into the pipeline leading straight to Dallas. It ended with Pete Bondurant (a fictional ex-cop and vicious strongarm enforcer whom Ellroy has working for Hughes among others) standing near the parade route: "The roar did a long slow fade. He braced himself for this big fucking scream."

In *Tabloid*, Ellroy was cutting himself loose from the strictures of the crime novel that he had upended and rewired with his L.A. Quartet series. The m.o. was familiar. The Quartet novels had played with history from its first installment, *The Black Dahlia*, finding room in the dark corners of Los Angeles' gloriously tawdry mid-century history for his brutal stories. *Dahlia's* follow-up, *The Big Nowhere*, used the Red Scare as backdrop and prime motivator. In the second half of the Quartet, *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*, which together stand as the author's most accomplished work, Ellroy dispensed with better-known history and dug deeper. The occasional real-life character, like gangster Mickey Cohen, graced the books' pages, but for the most part, Ellroy looked beyond the headline-grabbing details.

Ellroy's style is based on a lifelong love of detective novels, filtered through a borderline parody of '50s hepcat stylings and cinematic flourish. Roman Polanski and Robert Towne's *Chinatown*, with its smartly dressed characters, sharp verbal thrust-and-parry and the stolen-water conspiracy, can be seen as a forebear to the Quartet, which as a whole can be read as a counterweight to the onward and upward whitewash that is still often given as the history of America's postwar years. In the Quartet's pages, powerful men planned the future of Los Angeles—the template for modern America—plotting the attempted containment of minority neighborhoods and a carefully monitored drug trade; politicians cut deals with gangsters and cops (crooked by definition) and everybody violently double-crossed each other.

By the time of *White Jazz*, Ellroy's prose, which had always had a staccato rhythm, was heating up and burning off all the fat. In his later fiction, there would be an immense cast of characters culled from every dim hole of the underground; there would be no coincidences, only connections; the strong would win, the good would lose; and just about every crazy rumor you might hear was not only

true, but probably only a pale, bland approximation of the whole truth. *American Tabloid*, a gargantuan story with a finely woven set of thin, sharp storylines, kept the prose impossibly lean even as the plot swelled. Let loose of the physical confines of Los Angeles (with only a couple exceptions, even Ellroy's pre-Quartet books never left the smoggy basin), *Tabloid* took Ellroy's very particular obsessions—secret deals, power, violence, drugs, gossip, jazz, celebrity, racism—and, for better and for worse, put them on the national stage.

Tabloid was something of a letdown; if only because, for the first time, it seemed that Ellroy was covering known territory. It's still a worthwhile read; the sheer breadth of what the novel covers and the ferocity contained therein is by itself compelling. But Ellroy's patented tough guys stalked through *Tabloid's* landscape like agents of disaster, their motives even fuzzier and more conflicted than the rogue cops of the Quartet. The angles seemed familiar. The Chicago mob, Cuban exiles, Vegas casinos, fanatical anti-Communism and the shadowy anti-Kennedy coalition could all be found elsewhere in popular fiction, though rarely portrayed with such verve and gallows humor.

The *Cold Six Thousand*, Ellroy's follow-up to *Tabloid*, opens on a flight into Dallas the day of the assassination. Wayne Tedrow Jr. is a Vegas policeman on a semi-secret mission arranged by his juiced-in father, Wayne Sr., a right-wing Mormon bigwig with his fingers in a lot of pies. A black man named Wendell Durfee had knifed a casino dealer; the man lost an eye. A contract is put out on Durfee. Tedrow gets the call: "The Casino Operator's Council flew him. They supplied first-class fare. They tapped their slush fund. They greased him. They fed him six cold. Nobody said it."

Just a few pages later, Tedrow is with his Dallas police contact, a drunk by the name of Maynard Moore who just happens to be a good friend of Officer J.D. Tippit, soon to be killed by an on-the-run Lee Harvey Oswald.

While Tedrow is no innocent, even the weak conscience that he hangs on to marks him as a moral man in this company. The other two protagonists



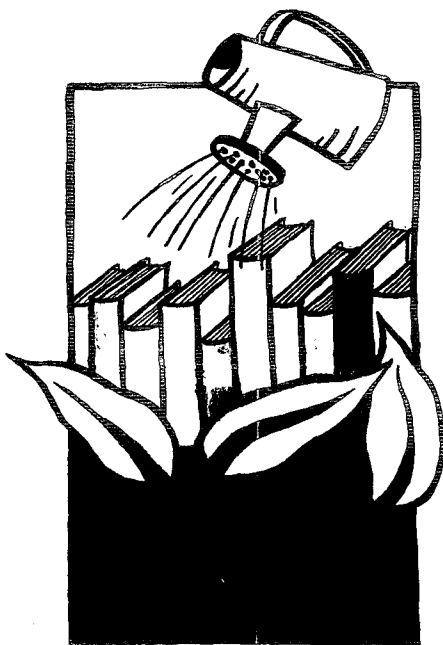
of *The Cold Six Thousand* are Ward Littel and Pete Bondurant, both of whom had major roles in *American Tabloid*. (Bondurant even rated a few mentions in *White Jazz*.) Littel is an alcoholic ex-FBI agent and former Jesuit seminarian who now cooks the books of several Vegas casinos, does legal work for Howard Hughes and dirty jobs for J. Edgar Hoover. Bondurant is a Class-A brute, an ex-cop, ex-Marine enforcer type for gangsters and various off-the-books government agencies who has an ugly past (he accidentally killed his brother doing a hit for Mickey Cohen, causing his parents to commit suicide after they found out). There's an element of self-parody in these men, as though Ellroy were trying to exhaust the genre with the extremity of his characters.

The speed is lightning-quick; there's hardly a paragraph that's more than two sentences long. Every page is packed with information; blink and you've missed about 40 major plot points. There are times when it reads more like a police rap sheet than a novel. Where many historical novelists often fill in the blanks in the factual record with filigree and lengthy conversations, Ellroy tries to pack more facts in; to cover everything possible. The book quickly becomes almost an alternate history of the Vietnam War era, with the usual run-through of civil rights battles and war protests taking a backseat to explications of the country's criminal underbelly.

From Dallas, the action moves to Vegas. There, Bondurant is trying to set up a crooked cab company that will use its drivers as spies to blackmail passengers with something to hide, as well as start dealing heroin (which the mob and their casino buddies previously had banned) but in the black neighborhoods only. Littel is working for J. Edgar Hoover on a scheme to undermine both Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Hoover refers to his two enemies as "The Dark Prince" and "Martin Lucifer King"; his sardonic phone conversations with Littel are among the highlights of the book. Meanwhile, Tedrow is hunting for Durfee, whom he just barely failed to kill in Dallas, and whom he thinks has come back to Vegas looking for trouble.

Meanwhile, though JFK is dead, the cause of a liberated Cuba has not

been forgotten by exiled extremists. Bondurant helps run their training camps in the Deep South, with the help of local Klan outfits. He is later recruited by a government operative to oversee a heroin smuggling operation out of Laos that flies the drugs to the states (via Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, where Tedrow's father has connections) and uses the profits to fund the anti-Castro crusade.



**Secret deals, power,
violence, drugs, jazz,
celebrity, racism ...**

Along the way, the little conspiracy that killed the president is trying to keep loose ends tied up. Everyone's loyalties are being pulled any number of different ways, and the plot gets twisted up almost too fast. But Ellroy keeps the atmosphere fresh by introducing a number of celebrity walk-ons and cameos—Sonny Liston, Rock Hudson, Sal Mineo, Sam Giancana, Jimmy Hoffa, Sammy Davis Jr.—and always bringing the story back to the country's post-JFK slide into paranoia and protest.

When Ellroy lets himself take a breath, he does come out with a nice line or two. Describing a small Southern town: "A main drag. Feed stores. Segregated shade. Whites on the side-

walk/Negroes in the street." The jazzy bop-bop of the writing is infectious and carries the reader fast through the most ludicrous and comic-book-like events (and there are plenty of those). The author has immersed himself so deep into the characters' lives that the most extraordinary details are treated as nothing special, like this description of a Bondurant ally: "He had a master's degree. He read comic books. He blew JFK's brains out. He lived with his parents. He stuck to his room. He built model planes and sniffed glue." So much detail has flown by at this point that it's almost easy to forget who JFK's actual killer was (at least in this novel's version of events).

By the time James Earl Ray and Sirhan Sirhan are slotted into the book's infernal machinations, and Ellroy's history of America has advanced another five years toward the present, you need a shower. The relentless drumbeat of deals, back-room torture, gunshots and racist invective has begun to feel like overkill. You can make the argument that the times demand this kind of story: an extreme novel for an extreme history. But the characters have so many of the same obsessions and desires that they begin to blur together, especially the women, who are mostly the same type of one-dimensional tough-talking femme fatales that Ellroy always employs.

Was this our history? Did the onrush of escalating crisis from 1960 to 1968 unfold in this manner, planned by ugly Americans with sordid minds and fat bankrolls? Or is that just the way we wish it had happened? There does seem to be a powerful human trait that forces one to look for reasons for inexplicably horrible events. Is it more comforting somehow to think that a powerful nexus of government agents and mafioso permanently altered the face of our nation? Patterns and reasons, no matter how disturbing, are generally preferable to sheer randomness. Call it negative wish fulfillment. ■

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By the Numbers

By Kim Phillips-Fein

In *Lucky Jim*, Kingsley Amis' satire of life in a university town in postwar Britain, the protagonist—a young historian stranded in the provinces—is asked the title of a journal article he has written, still unpublished after several attempts. The scholar can barely stand to answer the question. “It was,” he thinks, “a perfect title, in that it crystallized the article’s niggling

The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World, 1700-2000

By Niall Ferguson

Basic Books

552 pages, \$30

mindlessness, its funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems.” Finally, he coughs it out: “The Economic Influence of the Development of Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450 to 1485. After all, that’s what it’s ...” His voice trails off.

Had Niall Ferguson written such a paper, he would have stated the dry-as-dust title without pause. In fact, he probably would have managed to turn it into a raging controversy. Ferguson, a prolific Oxford don who’s just a shade too grown-up to still be deemed precocious, writes on such topics as bond yields and taxation, exchange rates and war finance. Yet despite—or perhaps because of—his work on the arcana of budgets and banks, Ferguson cultivates an image as a contrarian, dating back to his days as a Thatcherite “punk Tory” at Oxford, when he and best friend Andrew Sullivan would listen to the Sex Pistols and make fun of stodgy left-Labourites. Two years ago, Ferguson made a splash with his *The Pity of War*, which argued that Britain should have stayed out of World War I. This would have prevented the rise of Hitler and the Russian Revolution, and it would have enabled the country to hold onto its empire throughout the 20th century. The war, he wrote, was “the greatest error of modern history.”

The Pity of War made headlines all over a subdued Britain. The book was a

perfect illustration of Ferguson’s philosophy of history, expressed a few years earlier in a collection of essays on “counterfactual” history, asking such unanswerable questions as what if there had never been an American Revolution? What if Germany had beat the Soviet Union at Stalingrad? What if World War I just never happened? Every essay is a provocation to E.H. Carr, who dismissed counterfactuals as a “parlour game” in his *What Is History?* Such aggressiveness is par for the course for Ferguson. In all his books, his tone is that of the scholar ready to go to the mat. He’s so temperamentally inclined to historical combat that critics might well wonder if he will ever develop any sustained interpretive agenda of his own. Proclaimed brilliant as a young man, will he sink into a cantankerous middle age, debunking this claim, disproving that, his oeuvre little more than a compendium of harangues?

But Ferguson is more than an intellectual provocateur and celebrity don (who, according to one *New Yorker* pro-

**Other historians
just tell stories, but
Ferguson sees
himself as a tough
financial analyst.**

file, makes classrooms of undergrads swoon with his natty wardrobe and Tom Cruise good looks). His real target, throughout his work, is the last great generation of British Marxist historians: Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill. “At once materialist in conception and romantic at heart, an entire library of history has been based on the assumption that there was something fundamentally amiss with the capitalist economy,” he writes. His life’s work is to create a self-consciously non-Marxist economic history, rigorously

focused on finance as opposed to production or class—and focused *only* on finance, instead of trying to link the economy to culture, politics or intellectual life. His latest book, *The Cash Nexus*, a series of essays on financial history, is his most ambitious effort to write this kind of economic history yet.

Ferguson differs from the Marxists in method as well as subject. He criticizes narrative as overly “deterministic,” yet says that he is seeking a more “scientific” history. A devotee of chaos theory, he likens history to “a chaotic process, in the scientists’ sense of ‘stochastic behavior in a deterministic system.’” The job of the historian is to capture the perspective of the powerful individuals who made decisions about wars, battles, the economy, who did not know what the outcome of their choices might be. History turns on a hairpin; people act under short-term considerations—the falling price of a government bond, the next election or the last state budget—not the long-term abstractions of industrialization, urbanization, capitalist development.

But despite Ferguson’s appealing penchant for contention, this is a history that quickly loses its way. While he rejects determinism, in his focus on the most abstruse and technical aspects of economic institutions he rejects human agency as well. Absent the drama of the conscious struggle to shape the world, history—and the vocation of the historian—loses its meaning and moral significance.

As one might expect from a Ferguson book, *The Cash Nexus* takes an embattled tone from the beginning. He claims to be seeking simultaneously to disprove the sunny platitudes of Thomas Friedman, who suggests that free markets invariably encourage democracy, and the cataclysmic predictions of the Marxists, who see economic contradictions inexorably grinding society into dust. Against these forms of “economic determinism,” Ferguson asserts that the economy is subordinate to the state and to politics: “Money does not make the world go round. ... Rather, it has been political events—above all, wars—that have shaped the institutions of modern economic life: tax-collecting bureaucracies, central banks, bond markets, stock exchanges.”



But from the preface on, Ferguson is at odds with himself. Though he wants to demonstrate the primacy of politics, *The Cash Nexus* is a book about cash, not power. Ferguson takes the great questions of modern politics—war, social justice, imperialism—and reduces them to problems of financial history. The book promises much, but then delivers tables of bond prices and charts analyzing financial reportage from *The Economist*. Herodotus wrote, Ferguson grandly reminds us, “War is the father of all things.” But lest the imagination range too widely, he quickly brings us back to earth: “Among those things during the Peloponnesian War was an increase in Athenian expenditure, and consequently a need for higher taxes and other sources of revenue.” One almost imagines that he might argue that the most important outcome of the American Civil War was the invention of the 5-to-20-year bond. An extended discussion of the rise of social democracy in Western Europe is all about changes in the tax system. For Ferguson, the welfare state is unprecedented simply because it “breaks the link between contributions made and entitlements received.”

Even when writing about imperialism—the ultimate ascendancy of the state over the economy, the quest for ever-expanding political power—Ferguson is quick to restrict his analysis to finance. Imperialism, he explains, is *inexpensive*; economic constraints should not hold the United States back from intervening in conflicts around the world. This is why he finds American reluctance to deploy troops disappointing: “The leaders of the one state with the economic resources to make the world a better place lack the guts to do it.”

What is strange about Ferguson’s reduction of political questions to matters of finance is that finance itself is quintessentially political; it has to do with ownership, control, power and social obligation. War *does* revolutionize finance, and social democracy is, among other things, a way of organizing a tax system. But the difficulties of raising money for war, to take the military case, are more than an “inter-temporal budget constraint,” as Ferguson puts it. The tax code is the backbone of society, revealing the underlying bonds that link

people to one another, the obligations different groups within society are expected to bear to the whole. Far from being technical documents, state budgets reflect ideas about society that justify one distribution of wealth and power over another. This is why financial crises can precipitate vast social transformations. The French



Revolution, after all, began as a fiscal crisis; the Third Estate was convened to collect taxes. The American Revolution, as well, started out when the Crown had bills to be paid. Behind the austere columns of state budgets hide relationships of power and domination and ideas about justice. But instead of following the money, Ferguson just wants to count it.

Given his single-minded focus on the financial aspects of modern history, one wonders why Ferguson even bothers to argue for the primacy of politics. One possibility is that he’s nostalgic for the days when Britannia ruled the waves. Another is that he’s seeking to carve out a space for financial history against the predictive models of the economists. Or maybe he wants to prove that even politics can be best understood through detailed analysis of complicated financial instruments. At times, a note of economic machismo creeps into Ferguson’s work. Other historians just tell stories, but he sees himself as a tough-minded analyst working with tricky numbers. *The Cash Nexus* is not a narrative, but a series of

analytical chapters on questions such as “What causes stock market bubbles?” and “How far can exchange rate systems or monetary unions increase financial stability?” The idea here is that history, as he told one interviewer, standing in front of a blackboard covered with mathematics in his office in the Bank of London, must be “difficult to be good.”

In the pages of tables calculating bond yields and GDP, however, the scope of human action and political struggle—the effort of people with different ideas about society to shape the world—gets lost. Ferguson’s history may not exactly be deterministic, but its strict focus on financial institutions does not leave much room for human agency either. The great strength of the Marxist historians was to see that *all* aspects of society—ideas, culture, finance—could be the terrain of political conflict. They sought, in particular, to argue that the economy—so often seen as a realm of neutral laws and atomistic actors—was a political space, subject, like everything else, to the will of human beings, and therefore a potential realm of freedom.

By contrast, Ferguson seeks to reduce politics to the evolution of financial instruments and tax-collecting techniques. This elides the political and ideological aspects of finance, and it also reduces the great questions of modern history to tables of bond prices and the unthinking decisions of individual investors. So while Ferguson may see himself as a ruthless debunker of Marxian romanticism, he’s more reminiscent of the British intellectuals Nietzsche once denounced: “You always find them at the same task, whether they want to or not, looking for what is really effective and distinctive about our development where man’s intellectual pride would least wish to find it ... in [things that are] purely passive, automatic, reflexive, molecular.”

Despite his cleverness, ambition and zeal, in forsaking politics for bonds and interest rates Ferguson reveals himself to be flailing as a historian, trapped within *The Cash Nexus*. ■

Kim Phillips-Fein is an In These Times contributing editor. She can be reached at kkp4@columbia.edu.

Immigrant EXPERIENCE

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multimedia exploits of Niall
Ferguson and Simon Schama,
gadfly British historian A.J.P. Taylor pio-
neered the now ubiquitous role of the
"media don." In the '50s and '60s, Taylor
was a familiar fixture on the British
airwaves, delivering, often extemporane-
ously, radio and television lectures on the

strikingly original, often seemed willfully
perverse to his peers and colleagues. He
loved to twit the United States, and often
advocated an alliance between Britain
and the USSR. "Anyone who claims to
learn from history," he wrote with breath-
taking assurance in 1967, "should devote
himself to promoting an Anglo-Soviet
alliance, the most harmless and pacific of
all possible combinations."

Surely the Soviets could hardly be
called "pacific" (and Taylor himself once
wrote of Communism as "the barren
thing that it is." Yet ever the contrarian,
he could not tolerate the U.S. crusade
against the Soviet Union—what he
called a "prejudice [masquerading] under
the name of anti-Communism"—since
in his view, all Russia wanted was to be
left alone. His distrust of American
power, coupled with a passionate aware-
ness of the consequences of accidents in
history—a cherished historiographical
notion of his—and their terrible impli-
cations for the nuclear age, led Taylor in
the late '50s to become active in the
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament,
which counted among its members fel-
low radicals E.P. Thompson, Bertrand
Russell and Labour MP Michael Foot.

Despite his nearly 40-year affiliation
with Magdalen College at Oxford, he
never attained the more prestigious
University-wide professorships; Burk
makes it quite clear that Taylor's icono-
clasm cost him professionally. But while
his academic path stalled, his idiosyn-
crasies made him a great historian. As
Burk notes: "Trusting his intuition,
Taylor assumed the mantle of iconoclast.
He knew that he was good; he saw him-
self as basically a dissenter: and the result
was a stream of books and essays in
which he took delight in questioning
accepted historic truths."

Burk, who was one of Taylor's last stu-
dents in the early '70s, clearly reveres her
former teacher (but not uncritically). She
has written a mostly fine, well-researched
biography, which is good on Taylor the
man and Taylor the intellectual, but
marred by structural problems. Instead of
opting for a straightforward narrative
weaving together multiple threads of
Taylor's life, journalism and scholarly

Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor

By Kathleen Burk
Yale University Press
512 pages, \$35

topics of the day and the vagaries of the
European past to millions. Above all,
Taylor loved to write. A buccaneering
freelancer, he appeared frequently on the
books pages of the *Guardian* and the *New
Statesman*, leading organs of liberal jour-
nalism, and in more down-market papers,
which did little to endear him to his more
fastidious and media-shy colleagues, who
thought his have-opinion-will-sell-it
attitude merely vulgar. He cut to the
quick in his writing—of Metternich, he
wrote, "his thoughts, like those of most
conservatives, were banal and obvious"—
and cut the powerful down to size.

Over the course of his life, Taylor
cranked out some 1,600 book reviews (this
reviewer shudders at his productivity),
some 600 learned essays and 23 books. He
never seemed to suffer from writer's block.
A popularizer par excellence, Taylor wrote
with wit, playfulness and a common touch
that was neither vulgar nor dumb. But he
was also a real historian, who wrote serious
studies of European diplomacy, most noto-
riously *The Origins of the Second World War*
(1961)—more on that later.

The title of Kathleen Burk's new biog-
raphy, *Troublemaker*, is apt. Fellow
historian Hugh Trevor-Roper—Taylor's
antagonist in the fierce debates over
Hitler that roiled the intellectual world
after *Origins* was published—once
remarked, "The sad fact is that Taylor is
really too independent to have any sup-
port from any Establishment." Taylor
managed to annoy just about everybody in
the British historical profession, and his
interpretive daring, while sometimes



work, she divides his life into compartments, devoting separate chapters to his academic career, his scholarly output and his freelance life. We revisit the same episodes from a number of perspectives, but the result isn't as illuminating as Burk hopes. Still, Taylor's life is fascinating enough to overcome what missteps his biographer makes.

Born to an affluent, left-wing family in 1906 in the Lancashire town of Birkdale (now a suburb of Liverpool) and educated at Quaker schools, he went up to Oriel College, Oxford in 1924. When he hung a picture of Lenin in his rooms, they were wrecked—presumably by a toff who thought him a Communist. Though he did join the CP briefly, Taylor was disgusted with what he saw as the party's do-nothing approach in the General Strike of 1926.

Taylor stumbled into history by accident, he was fond of saying. Uncertain about his path after graduation in 1928, he briefly clerked with his uncle (a prominent left-wing barrister), but grew bored with the job. He returned to Oriel for graduate work in history. Told that he would have to learn German if he were to become a historian, he shipped off to Vienna, a fitting city for a young radical like Taylor—it had a socialist mayor and a social-democratic culture (and lurking darker elements, of course). As Burk writes, "For those on the left, it was one of the most exciting places in Europe to live." Vienna also turned Taylor away from the Anglocentric history prominent at Oxford, and toward Central Europe and Germany, areas that became two of the abiding interests in his scholarship.

The two-year stint in Vienna resulted in his first book (on the Great Powers and Italy), a pioneering work of diplomatic history. Upon his return to England in 1930, he secured an appointment at Manchester University. In the '30s, Taylor became active in trade-union politics, developing his talent for speaking to audiences by often

addressing hundreds in town meetings. In 1938, he became a fellow of Magdalen College, where he remained in varying capacities until 1978.

During the war, Taylor lectured servicemen about modern Europe and also delivered radio lectures. After the war ended, he continued to write, and moved into television work, his opinions often running afoul of the BBC. This fame

ship. Here was another example of stubborn old Taylor, but also of his skepticism about intentions and ideology. For Taylor, Burk writes, "writings such as *Mein Kampf* were largely irrelevant; they may have expressed hopes or dreams, but they were not organized blueprints for action."

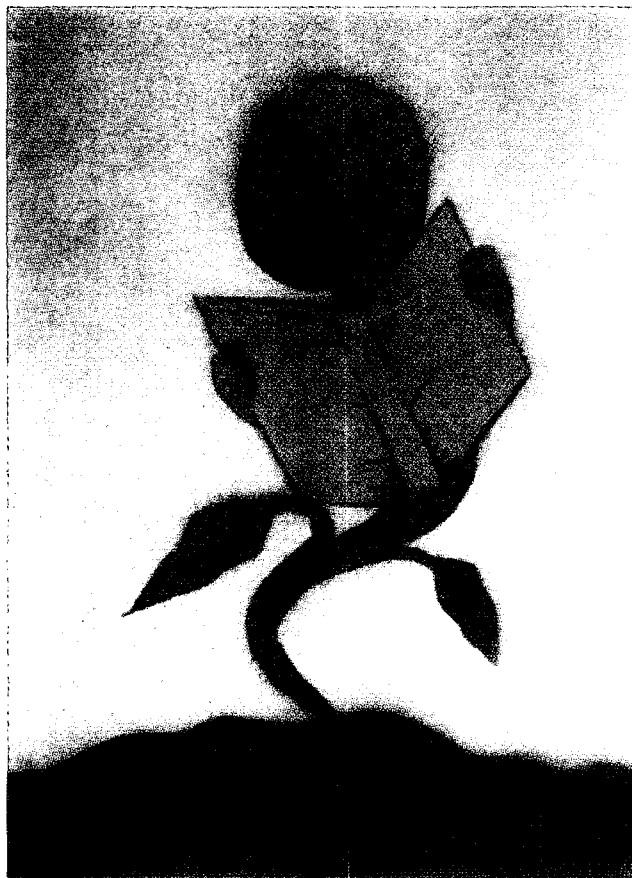
Still, *Origins* has survived as a classic. Full of compact, epigrammatic sentences, it still startles today, not least because of his notion that there were no "good guys"; it was, he writes, a "story without heroes; and perhaps even without villains." And the story he tells is as much about the missteps and bumbles of the Allies as Nazi aggression. He respects the complexity of history, how events have their own logic. His attempt to put Hitler into the context of German history—to strip him of his supernatural varnish—is rather profound. But Taylor hardly lets him off the hook for his crimes: He may have acted like other statesmen, but "in wicked acts he outdid them all."

He claims that Hitler merely reflected the German people, another leader in a long line of German nationalists. This sort of Germanophobia can get the better of him, but his notions about the relationship between the German people and the Führer, while still controversial, have been taken up by other historians. (One need only read Ian Kershaw's brilliant two-volume life of Hitler for a full-fledged exploration of this dynamic.)

So what is Taylor's legacy today? After Taylor died in 1990, his obituaries were warm; even Trevor-Roper wrote a fond reminiscence. Burk writes:

"How and why he was great is a difficult question—he instigated no new methodology, opened up no new field of research, left no school of disciples." True, but, as one of Taylor's acolytes said, "What was striking was not the novelty of his topic but the brilliance of his treatment." For Taylor, a little style went a long way. ■

Matthew Price is associate editor of *Lingua Franca*.



A.J.P. Taylor managed to annoy just about everybody in the British historical profession.

shaded into notoriety after *The Origins of the Second World War* was published in 1961. Many accused Taylor of being a Hitler apologist—with the war and Holocaust all too recent, statements like "in principle and doctrine, Hitler was no more wicked and unscrupulous than many a contemporary statesman" were simply too shocking to contemplate. The fact that Taylor had not read *Mein Kampf* set him up for charges of shoddy scholar-

Planet of Sound

By Ben Winters

Making music has always been a political act. When Franz Liszt insisted he and his fellow pianists were the social equals of the courtiers for whom they played, he was tampering with long established hierarchies. When Billie Holiday put aside the love songs to sing of the "Strange Fruit" hanging from the branches of Southern trees, she was an activist as much as a

**We Owe You Nothing
Punk Planet: The Collected
Interviews**

Edited by Daniel Sinker

Akashic Books

346 pages, \$16.95

balladeer. Many artists opt not to trouble their audiences with such glum material, and stick with the love songs—tempered perhaps with the occasional Pepsi jingle. And that, whether one is aware of it or not, is also a political decision.

Punk rock didn't add politics to rock, it simply turned it up in the mix. And for all its raw-throated immediacy and transience, American punk rock has a healthy sense of history. It has controversial founding fathers like Fugazi's Ian MacKaye, former Dead Kennedy Jello Biafra, and one-time Black Flag Henry Rollins. It has a long group memory, as evidenced by Operation Ivy patches worn today by kids who were toddlers when that band split up.

And it has institutional journals like *Punk Planet*, a thick bimonthly launched in the spring of 1994 by Chicago art student Daniel Sinker. According to the introduction of *We Owe You Nothing*, a new anthology of *Punk Planet* interviews, Sinker—a music fan and utter non-journalist—was frustrated with the "wildly reactionary" stance of *Maximum Rock n Roll*, punk's best-known chronicler, toward the sudden mainstream approval of the punk aesthetic and of specific bands like Green Day and Nirvana. "Many bands, including quite a few I was friends with, found themselves locked out of *Maximum's* pages," Sinker recalls, "having been deemed 'not punk.'"

It's no surprise, then, that seven years later *Punk Planet* has given birth to a

collection that takes a remarkably long view of "punk." Taken together, the 25 interviews are a snapshot of a loosely defined community—positioned at the rough intersection of passionate leftist politics and angry, untutored rock 'n' roll. This is a piece of territory wide enough to include the somber, righteous self-control of Rollins, the quirky world-tweaking of Negativland, the Hare Krishna consciousness of Shelter; and radical voices from outside music, like Noam Chomsky and the women of the Central Ohio Abortion Access Fund.

The book is good because punk rockers are smart. Kathleen Hanna (formerly of Bikini Kill, now of Le Tigre) describes how her songwriting on her solo *Julie Ruin* LP had the unlikely influence of art critic John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, and then draws a grand and illuminating comparison between the problems of the American feminist movement and Yugoslavia's transition from Communism. Biafra offers a savvy analysis of how successful rockers like Pearl Jam might be persuaded to put their money back into communities, while Jody Bleyle (formerly of the bands Hazel and Team Dresch and the queer punk label Candy Ass) worries about how "punk political messages are being commodified on a certain level." She wonders: "For how many people is punk really a fetish?" That disjunction—between a sincere, self-sustaining punk community and a mainstream "commodification"—is more simply stated as the Sell Out Question, and it hangs over the interviews in this book like a toxic cloud.

Major labels especially are the *bête noir* of the punk planet. Everyone in the book (including Sinker himself) began their enterprise by deciding very consciously to work outside the system, to create an authentic expression without asking for the validation—or material support—of any establishment entity. What to do, then, when the establishment likes what it hears and want to make a deal?

"There's a valid reason that people jump to the conclusion that anyone working with a major label is doing it for a stupid or

selfish reason," avers Chicago über-producer Steve Albini. "That's because the only possible advantage to working with a major label is that you might make more money." But the "ugly truth," Albini concludes, is that you usually don't.

Ian MacKaye, meanwhile, cautions that remaining outside the system—as Fugazi did, rather famously—means a lot of work: "One aspect of Do It Yourself is that you really have to do it yourself. ... We manage ourselves, we book ourselves, we do our own equipment upkeep, we do our own recording, we do our own taxes." A couple hundred pages later, the guys from Los Crudos go MacKaye one better, explaining why their artistic principles dictate that they individually hand-screen all of their own record covers.

Those who've gotten in bed with major labels, like British anarchists turned pop superstars Chumbawamba, toss and turn over the implications of their decision. This leads to one of the best quotes in all of *We Owe You Nothing*, from frontman Boff: "When we first started writing songs, we thought that choruses were the tools of the capitalist imperialists." His is a statement rich with irony considering that the band's breakout hit in 1997, "Tubthumping," ("I get knocked down / but I get up again," etc.) is essentially all chorus.

We Owe You Nothing, like a winningly passionate but under-produced punk 45, is frustrating in places. Sinker would have done well to include the original publication date of each interview, and the profiles' introductions can be adoring to the point of meaninglessness—as when we're told that Fugazi "is the culmination of all that came before it and the embodiment of all that would come after." But in general, the *Punk Planet* style is rewarding. Much more so than mainstream journalists, Sinker and the interviewers he employs are willing to inject their own consciousness and sense of place into the conversations. The result is a collection rich with actual dialogue and the exchange of ideas, rather than dull star stories.

How perfectly punk. ■

Ben Winters, a freelance writer based in Los Angeles, once played bass for the D.C. punk band Corm. When Ben quit, they got really good. His e-mail address is ben_winters@hotmail.com.



The Big Rip-Off

By Robert McClelland

My friend Mike Butkus is a precinct captain on Chicago's Northwest Side. He's been in the political game since the '70s, when Old Man Daley ran the city, so he's seen some dirty campaigns. But

Smashmouth: Two Years in the Gutter with Al Gore and George Bush

By Dana Milbank
Basic Books
377 pages, \$26

Down & Dirty: The Plot To Steal the Presidency

By Jake Tapper
Little, Brown
514 pages, \$24.95

last fall's presidential election, he told me one night as we were shooting darts, "was the biggest rip-off in the history of the world. Al Gore got totally jagged."

Every time I see him, Mike is carping about George W. Bush. "He's an idiot." "He's a jag-off from Texas." "He's gonna fuck over Chicago." When we had lunch together right after St. Patrick's Day, Mike not only brought his grievances, he brought two brand-new books.

"What's this?" I said, as we slid into a window booth at Kevin's Hot Dog Heaven. "I've never even seen you with one book."

"First two books about the election." Mike rapped the covers with his knuckles. "Already?"

"I read 'em both over the weekend. Couldn't stop. My kids were tryin' to get me to watch the NAAs, and I said, 'Get outta my face. I'm readin'.' Finally, they pushed my chair out of the room so they could watch TV. I just kept goin'."

Mike thinks I'm a liberal goo-goo because I put Adlai Stevenson and Eugene McCarthy in my pantheon of Democratic heroes. He says those guys were losers compared to real politicians like LBJ and the Old Man.

"If you wanna understand what politics is really about, take these books home and read 'em," he insisted.

Smashmouth, the campaign diary of *Washington Post* gadabout Dana Milbank, tries to persuade us that politics is war by other means. The best campaigns are eye-gouging, groin-kicking, sand-in-the face brawls: "In the smashmouth world of politics, if you don't differentiate yourself and say what's wrong with the other guy, you aren't going to win."

For decades, the Democrats nominated milk-and-water liberals who went out onto the stump and apologized for everything the party stood for. In Al Gore, they had a candidate who was willing to play dirty. He once vowed to "rip the lungs out" of anyone who stood between him and the presidency. That doesn't sound like a Michael Dukakis soundbite. Early in the campaign, Gore stole a Republican tactic, and hammered Bush not only for what he believed, but for who he was, and where he came from. His campaign strategy was



to portray Texas as "a polluted, illiterate, gun-toting backwater."

Meanwhile, on the Republican side, Bush was trying hard not to come off as a meanie. Bush campaigned from the middle of the road, but nobody—Milbank included—seemed to notice that all his buddies were standing on the right-hand shoulder. Even though *Smashmouth* has a 2001 copyright date, it includes nuggets like "there

are many reasons for liberals to like some of Bush's ideas," and "for conservatives, these are not the best of times. The only serious candidates are George W. Bush and John McCain, both of whom are running as moderates." You'd think this would make the book obsolete already, but future candidates could use it as a manual on How to Succeed In Politics By Really, Really Lying.

Nowadays, one of the difficulties of writing a campaign book is telling us something we haven't already seen on television. Milbank found it difficult to get close to the main characters—Bush and Gore were both like the Great Oz, meant to be seen only as awesome figures on giant screens—so he fills his book with cute stories involving third-string aides and candidates. Gore spokesman Chris Lehane was a wacky prankster who once put a zucchini in another campaign staffer's briefcase, while campaign scheduler Lisa Berg was suspected of spending too much time in the bathroom. Since Bush won't give him an interview, in the primaries Milbank goes on the road with Sen. Orrin Hatch, one of the Republican "irrelevancies," and reports that the poor man's conservative is eating at Wendy's, Taco Bell and Burger King. ("Junk food really does appeal to me," Hatch chirps bravely.)

Once the Nice Guys were eliminated, it turned out that the Democrats showed a darker side than the Republicans. The Republican convention was like an Up With People! concert, but the Democrats brought in Bill Daley, the Old Man's son, who sounds like the stoic, murderous Victor the Cleaner from *La Femme Nikita*. Mike's kind of guy. "He got his doctorate in politics in Chicago," says Chuck Campion, a Democratic consultant and friend of Daley's. "Most politics is Cub Scouts. They're Hell's Angels."

As bad as he wanted to be, Gore couldn't do any better than a tie in the election. Milbank thinks it's because the vice president turned into a softie after his obnoxious, shut-up-while-I'm-trying-to-talk performance in the first debate. He cites a poll that shows most voters thought Gore was more unfair in the debate, but also that he

Spring Books.....

was more effective. Americans love bad boys. "In the second debate, when Gore heeded advisers and pundits and toned down his attacks, his performance was far worse," Milbank writes. "The neutered Gore still hasn't recovered on the eve of the election."

The real campaign, where power-hungry nastiness was all that mattered, occurred in Florida, after the voting was done. In *Down and Dirty*, Salon.com correspondent Jake Tapper makes both parties sound like looters scuffling over a television set. The election in Florida was so close, the public's verdict so ambiguous, that either guy could have won if the ballots had been counted the "right" way. (The *Miami Herald* recounts prove that. The Bush-Gore election turned out to be like a hypertext novel, with several alternate endings.) This was where the Democrats reverted to the wimpiness they perfected in the '70s and '80s.

The Republicans had two big advantages during the recount: the country club faction's sense of entitlement, and the yahoo wing's conviction that God had enlisted them in a jihad to make George W. Bush president. As soon as Faux News election director John Ellis ordered his network to call Florida for his cousin George, "the Bushies have decided on one message: Bush won, and everything that happens from this moment on is crazy, illegitimate, Gore-propelled nonsense."

That scorn was personified by Bush's recount "general," James Baker, who projected the intolerant wrath of a 16th-century Spanish cardinal. After the Florida Supreme Court decided to allow Gore's hand recounts to continue, "Baker and his crew are livid," Tapper writes. "They are, after all, the types who are used to getting their way. They've been getting their way their entire lives."

From the very beginning, Bill Daley was "pessimistic" about Gore's chances.



The Republicans never stole an election in Chicago, so how could the Democrats do it in Florida, a.k.a. the "Jeberglades"? Gore couldn't even get good lawyers: All the big firms were afraid of Bush's little brother. Tapper calls the Republicans "hypocrites" for opposing hand recounts, but he forgives them, because, after all, they were just trying to win an election. And Gore was being just as hypocritical by trying to recount four Democratic counties, then going on TV to insist "we must count every vote."

By the end, Tapper concludes that the battle for Florida had nothing to do with fairness, or democracy, or the Constitution. It was "a war between thieves," with one principle: power. And power goes to the most ruthless. While Gore was appearing on TV to smilingly beg for patience, Bush's people were cheating shamelessly. Tapper

includes an entire chapter on a Bush plan to persuade white servicemen to vote *after* the election. He never proves it happened, but he notes that a suspicious surge of ballots arrived a week after November 7. The Democrats, still scarred by their Cold War-era image as unpatriotic pinkos, backed down on their attempt to challenge the votes. "The Gorebies are gunshy, wimpy," Tapper writes, "while the Bushies are hungrier, more willing to do anything they can to win."

As soon as I turned the last page of *Down and Dirty*, I called up Mike. I was shaken. I couldn't believe such things could happen in a democracy, I told him. "The American people don't like dishonest elections," I said. "I'm sure there will be a backlash against the Republicans once the public reads this book."

"Remember the backlash against Kennedy after the Old Man helped him steal the presidency? Remember when LBJ cheated his way into the Senate, how much it hurt his career?" Mike asked. "Have you seen any riots against Bush?"

"Well, there have been some demonstrations ..."

"You think he cares? Last I looked, 60 percent of the country thought he was a good guy."

"I guess everybody loves a winner," I said.

"You got it!" Mike bellowed into my ear. "You finally got it! I'm gonna introduce you to the ward committeeman."

Mike's going to start me off slowly in real-life politics. Next year, we may go out to the Republican neighborhoods around O'Hare Airport and write "overflowing garbage" tickets for people with the wrong yard signs. If I do a good job, he promises me, someday I can help steal an election. ■

Robert McClelland recently joined his ward's Regular Democratic Organization.

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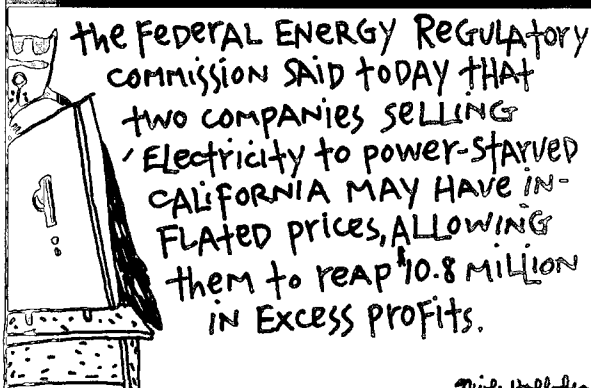
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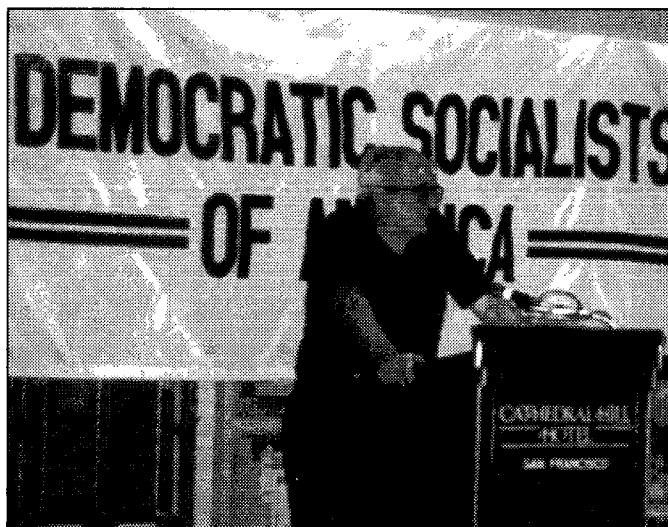


Continued from page 38

and Western European officials who were dealing with it—or, rather, who failed to deal with it. Had the United States come through with a \$5 billion loan, Ante Markovic, the last reform president of Yugoslavia, might have been able to get the Yugoslav economy back on track. And Markovic needed it to have a carrot to give to local republic leaders as a stake for staying in the federation. Yugoslavia was so decentralized by this time that there were very few assets the federation had, leaving little by way of a compelling reason to stay in. And had the reform leaders of Vojvodina, Croatia, Slovenia and even part of the Bosnian and Serbian leadership ganged up against Milosevic when he began to show his cloven hoof, back in 1987-1988, Yugoslavia could have been saved. The federation had no business letting Kosovo be a Serbian problem. Kosovo was getting transfer funds from the more developed republics, but they had a political interest in it. The Kosovar leadership which Milosevic attacked in the mid-'80s was pro-Yugoslav. Once they got rid of them, all that remained was local nationalists and separatists.

You're a Serb by origin, but Croatia is your homeland. How did this affect your life during the war between Serbia and Croatia?

I was the target of many threats—phone calls from Croat nationalists saying they were going to cut my throat. The police in the early days of the war were not particularly protective of its citizens—on the contrary, many of them



Denitch addresses the Democratic Socialist of America.

participated in the thuggery. And I was involved in polemics with the leading newspapers that were attacking me because of my criticisms of the Tudjman government's nationalism, its human rights abuses, its censorship of the press and its right-clericalist policies. I actually filed a slander suit against the leading paper in the country.

I founded Transition to Democracy, which has chapters in Belgrade, Zagreb, Split and Sarajevo and a working group in Pristina. We started functioning right when the war broke out in 1991. We've held a meeting every year since then, bringing together human rights activists, trade unionists, opposition journalists from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia and occasionally people from

**"THE UNITED STATES
HAS BEEN TOO SOFT ON THE
WAR CRIMES ISSUE. THEY
★★★★ HAVEN'T
PUSHED ★★★★★
FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF
ENOUGH PEOPLE."**

Bulgaria, Albania, Romania and Hungary. We're one of the few NGOs that makes a point of gathering people from all parts of the former Yugoslavia and beyond. These meetings, which we call the Summer School for Democracy and Social Justice, last one week each summer. We've been joined by solidarity activists from Germany, Sweden, Holland, France, the European Federation of Trade Unionists and other groups.

What kinds of things has the organization accomplished?

We have a multimedia project in Split, where we get young people together for alternative cultural events. We conduct a large monthly forum, attracting 300 to 600 people for debates, in Split, Novisad and Zagreb. We provide legal aid for refugees trying to return and to victims of human rights abuses. We're doing this in a way different than other NGOs who work on this: We sue cops and judges and local officials who obstruct the return of refugees or the return of minorities to jobs they've been thrown out of. We've got 53 cases going on at the moment in Croatia. We're going according to the Croatian government's claim that these expulsions were not a government policy—well, if they weren't government policy, then the people responsible must be held accountable and justice must be served.

Remember that a quarter of a million Serbs were driven out of Croatia and another 100,000 or so left on their own. In 1992-1993, a lot of Serbs were thrown out of their apartments, completely illegally. Now we're getting some of these people to return, and to sue to get their apartments back. One of the more interesting ways we're going about this is we're suing for back rent: Someone's been living in my apartment for four or five years, I want that money! The reform government in Zagreb isn't bad on this; it's the local officials, left over from the Tudjman administration, who are the problem. Croatia's president, Stipe Mesic, is excellent—he's committed to human rights and to punishing Croatian war criminals.

You've said that emotionally you're still a citizen of Yugoslavia—of what you call the "real" Yugoslavia. What do you mean by that?

I mean a multi-ethnic state which makes a major effort to create equality for all of its national groups; one which is modernist and secular. Of all the one-party, state-socialist societies,

Yugoslavia was by far the most liberal and open in Europe. It had political prisoners, but it also had a relatively free press. It certainly had a freer press than the post-Yugoslav states do. I think democratizing that Yugoslavia was a worthy and doable project, a far better one than building these micro-states, all of which are going to be less independent than Yugoslavia was. The estimate in Croatia is that it will take roughly 20 years to reach the relative living standards that it had in 1989. Was it worth it? I don't think so. A fight to get rid of Milosevic inside Yugoslavia would have taken far less effort—and could have prevented the wars and the disintegration of the country.

Let's talk about your position on the Kosovo intervention.

It was a very hard position for me to adopt. It horrified my relatives, longtime associates, close friends and comrades in Belgrade. But my position was that there had to be an intervention. I reject the claim that it was the intervention that caused the mass exodus of the Albanians. Massive killings and expulsions were taking place before the NATO intervention, and there was a record of more than 10 years of Serbian repression against the Albanians in Kosovo. Virtually every male Albanian had been in the hands of the Serbian police at one point or another, and those were not tender hands.

But the way it was carried out was another matter. Announcing the bombing plans three months in advance was sheer idiocy on Clinton's part. And the U.S. doctrine that you can't risk the lives of your soldiers is scandalous. What it says is that no matter how many civilian lives might be at risk as a consequence of that policy, you're going to bomb, from up in the air where accuracy is impossible. So I was against an air campaign if ground troops weren't also involved. My view was that the intervention should have been done on land, and quickly, without letting the Serbs build up, and they should have occupied Kosovo. An earlier and quicker land intervention would have been more successful and done less damage. Had it been done this way, among other consequences, it would have been a lot less possible for the Albanians to take revenge on the Serbs who remained.

What are your thoughts on the arrest of Milosevic?

The Serbian establishment was split on exactly how to do it. I hope it's a step on the road to The Hague. It's essential he be tried in Belgrade for his crimes in Serbia and in The Hague for his war crimes. But I don't think he can be given a fair trial in Serbia. Either the judges will be too hostile toward him or his appointees will be too protective of him. I think the government made a mistake in not delivering him to The Hague. By keeping it in Belgrade they lose either way: If the sentence is too light, it will be illegitimate in the court of world opinion; and if the sentence isn't properly documented legally and so on, again it will be considered a joke. It's a crisis of legitimacy. I think they had to bite the bullet and argue (which some of my friends in Belgrade do) that to send him to The Hague is not to send him abroad, so they don't need to change the constitution to send him there, because The Hague is a U.N. institution and therefore not in a foreign country.

What about the argument, made not just by Serbian nationalists but by many Western leftists, that The Hague is largely a tool of the United States and NATO?

I think that's crap. The United States is the sole remaining superpower—of course it's going to have a major influence on international institutions. The question is: What is that influence? Is it good or bad in this case? In my view the United States has been too soft on the war crimes issue. They haven't pushed for the punishment of enough people.

What kind of future do you see emerging today in the former Yugoslavia?

I'm afraid I see a very rough future, given the situation in the world economy and in Europe. The safety valve of Europe, for unemployed people to go find work, is gone, and that's going to hurt. Brain drain is also hurting Croatia and Serbia very badly. The economy in Serbia is really very far gone. I think they have to steer an extremely cautious course to avoid taking the IMF/World Bank formula whole; they have to steer between the possible and the desirable. I think the Macedonians are going to find themselves paying a very heavy price for their adventure in Taiwan; their recognition of Taiwan and establishing official relations with the island means that China is going to veto aid to Macedonia. The central problem in all areas of the former Yugoslavia—except for Slovenia—is the stupendous level of corruption and the difficulty in re-establishing a legitimate civil society with legitimate institutions. ■

Danny Postel is the editor of the forthcoming *Debating Kosovo*, a book about the split in left opinion over the Kosovo intervention. *Transition to Democracy* can be contacted at ttd@igc.org.

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CITIZEN OF A LOST COUNTRY



AN INTERVIEW WITH

BY DANNY POSTEL



In 1991, I and millions of others saw our homeland dissolve into chaotic violence," writes Bogdan Denitch in his forthcoming autobiography. "There was an endgame, apocalyptic atmosphere in the circles of democratic dissident intellectuals among whom I moved in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana."

The journey recounted in *Changing Identities: A Story of Democratic Leftism in Two Countries* spans from World War II, in which Denitch fought in the Royal Yugoslav army, through the world of the '50s New York left, in which he rubbed shoulders with the likes of Max Schactman, Hal Draper and Michael Harrington, to the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

Along the way, Denitch became a sociology professor at the City University of New York, joined the editorial board of *Dissent*, co-founded the Democratic Socialists of America, and established himself as a leading scholar of Eastern European politics. The Hungarian-born sociologist Andrew Arato calls Denitch "simply the best American author writing about the states that used to constitute Yugoslavia."

Two of his works form fascinating bookends to the Yugoslav wars of the first half of the '90s. *Limits and Possibilities: The Crisis of Yugoslav Socialism and State Socialist Systems* was published in 1990. Written before the breakup and published just as the bloodshed was beginning, it now reads as a prescient analysis of the forces which were about to tear the country apart. *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (1994, revised 1996) was his response to the cataclysm as it was taking place.

In 1991, with a group of Yugoslav colleagues, he started an NGO called Transition to Democracy, with the purpose of fostering ethnic tolerance and social justice in a land



becoming submerged in nationalist violence. It now operates offices in Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo.

Denitch, now professor emeritus at CUNY, splits his time between his activist work and his writing, and between New York and Brac, the Dalmatian island in Croatia on the Adriatic Sea where he has had a home since the late '60s.

You've argued that the breakup of Yugoslavia was not inevitable. How, precisely, do you think it could have been prevented?

It could have been prevented had there not been a failure of the political class ruling in Yugoslavia, and of the American

Continued on page 36

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